

TOP STORY: THE END OF INTEGRATION?

November 13-26, 1995

# IN THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

## THE BREAST SCIENCE MONEY CAN BUY

The corporate  
spin on implant  
research

Ben Lilliston  
reports

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# E D I T O R I A L

## THE TRIUMPH OF GREED

**T**he House budget bill, passed last month, epitomizes the Republicans' determination to end the social contract forged in the 1930s between the managers and owners of corporate America and the tens of millions of working people who create their wealth.

Though GOP leaders couldn't eliminate politically popular programs such as Medicare, their budget still reflects the triumph of rapacious greed and irresponsible individualism over social well-being and rationality. Theirs is a program for disaster, not only for the millions of Americans for whom the private sector will not or cannot provide minimum sustenance and security, but for our nation as a living entity.

Consider the Republican plan for Medicare—and the rationale they offer for it. The Republicans claim that they must cut \$270 billion from Medicare funding over the next seven years in order to save it. Everyone knows, and some Republican advisers have publicly admitted, that this is a lie, pure and simple—one designed only to sell the idea to a public kept ignorant by our commercial media. True, the 1995 Hospital Insurance Trust Fund trustees' report noted that by 2002 the fund would begin to pay out more in Part A hospital benefits than it collected in payroll taxes. Until then there will still be a surplus each year that is supposed to go into a protected fund to pay for future shortfalls. That issue is ignored by all (because the surplus has consistently been spent to hide the true extent of the annual federal deficit). But even forgetting that, the trustees have made similar predictions in 24 annual reports since 1970. In each case, minor adjustments in payroll taxes or payments to providers have been made to compensate for the shortfall. So while there is a problem, there is no crisis.

In fact, as the Democrats point out, the cuts in Medicare are being made simply to balance the loss of income caused by some \$245 billion in tax cuts, half of which would go to families with incomes of \$100,000 or more.

Furthermore, the Medicare cuts and other provisions in

the Medicare bill would devastate nursing homes and force the closing of many rural and inner-city hospitals, while discouraging other hospitals from accepting Medicare patients. And the provisions in the Republican plan to encourage people to join HMOs would split Medicare recipients into two disparate groups. The healthy elderly would be offered attractive HMO deals, the sickest of the elderly, unattractive to profit-oriented HMOs, would remain with Medicare. As a result, the average cost of caring for Medicare patients would rise astronomically.

These major changes just scratch the surface. The Republican bill also contains provisions, too numerous to detail here, designed to increase the profitability of health care and insurance corporations at the expense of consumers.

Consider the tax bill itself. Ostensibly designed to stimulate investment, the Republican bill reduces the capital gains tax, a benefit to the wealthy that economists almost unanimously agree will have little or no impact on productive investment. And the Republicans deny that they are increasing anyone's taxes, even while they have eliminated the earned-income tax credit, a move that will mean higher

*Passage of the House budget bill cries out for a renewed class-based politics.*

taxes for families with incomes of \$30,000 or less. In other words, the Republican bill is a gift to their wealthy sponsors and a sharply regressive attack on low-income working people.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich claims that by pointing such things out, the Democrats are promoting class warfare. Unfortunately, with a few exceptions, he is mis-

taken. Most of Gingrich's Democratic opponents are just as beholden to wealthy sponsors as he is. Of course, with Gingrich the game is to deny the existence of class politics even while playing it.

The problem is that the American people have been convinced that the source of their woes is government, rather than corporate control of government. And the tragedy is the absence of a political force willing and able to address this question. The function of the commercial media is to perpetuate the illusion that government is the problem, but with the Republicans demonstrating their class loyalties ever more blatantly, the potential for an intelligent class politics increases. If the left is ever to revive it will have to take up Gingrich's challenge and begin fomenting a true class-based politics. ◀

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COVER PHOTO © 1995 PETER HANNAN

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# LETTERS

## Technical difficulty

I was glad to see Joel Bleifuss' article ("Nightmare soil," October 16) on land application of sludge. We in southwest Virginia have been waging a war against this for five years or more.

Virginia Tech has been our major problem. It joined with Penn Virginia Resources, a mineral and landholding corporation, to form the Powell River Project. The expressed purpose of the project was to promote better surface-mined land reclamation. Very quickly, however, their work moved toward the "beneficial reuse" of wastes.

Tech soil scientist Lee Daniels applied Philadelphia sludge to 150 acres of stripped land at a rate of 50 tons per acre, in violation of a Wise County waste ordinance. When Daniels proposed phase II of the "experiment," the application of sludge on an unidentified 2,000 acres of Wise County land, we were able to generate countywide opposition.

Sludge, however, was only part of

Daniels' plan. In order to prevent plant uptake of the heavy metals in sludge, the pH of the soil must be boosted. In order to prevent nitrogen runoff, the sludge must be mixed with a high carbon material. The solution? Boost the pH with fly ash from coal-burning power plants, and mix the sludge with paper-mill wastes!

Sponsors of Daniels' work included Envirogro (now part of WMX), Virginia Power and Meade Paper. Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), headed by Peter Schmidt, a cement man and old football buddy of Gov. George Allen, issued new regulations for the beneficial reuse of fly ash. The scientific expert for the DEQ was Lee Daniels. Sludge can now be used in reclamation. And fly ash can be used to meet the approximate original contour requirements of the federal Surface Mining Control and Land Reclamation Act of 1977.

Wise County's waste law has continued to prevent the hauling of either

sludge or fly ash into the county. However, a bill was introduced in last year's General Assembly that would have prevented counties from having waste laws "more stringent than the Commonwealth's." We heard of the bill in time to force its withdrawal, but expect it to be reintroduced in January. If Allen gets his hoped-for majority, it may be impossible to block it again.

David L. Rouse  
Wise, Va

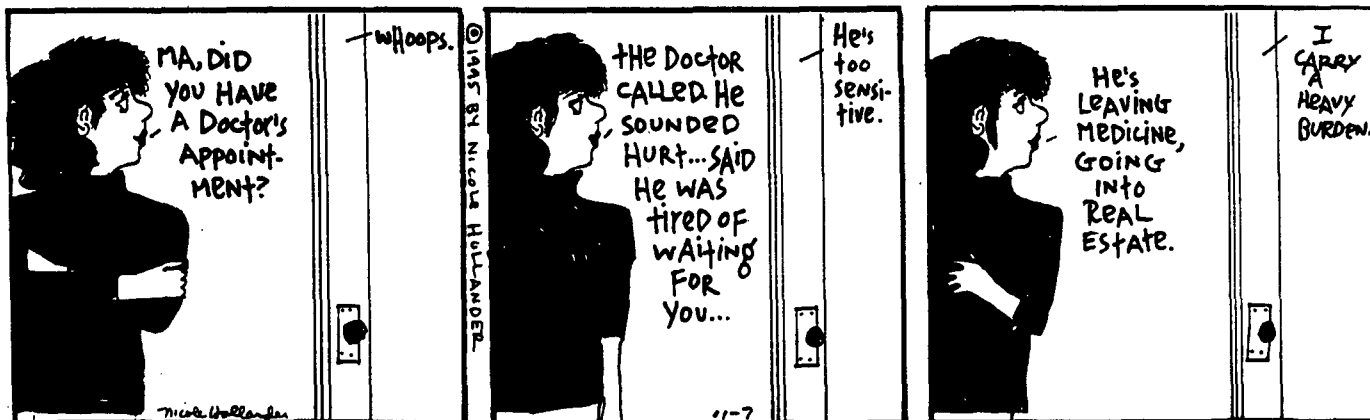
## Glass houses

Joel Bleifuss' article ("Fiberglass, the asbestos of the '90s," August 21) hit most every big coffin nail on the head. One point I might add is that fiberglass is not only hazardous today; it will remain a major headache for years to come, as we dispose of the fiberglass in millions of homes and offices. People who have severe, yet unexplained, allergies, debilitating respiratory infections, chronic fatigue, nausea and dizziness may simply be getting a big dose of the filthy, formaldehyde-laced mineral fibers contained in fiberglass. Whether they're boat builders in Louisiana or state government workers in Sacramento, Calif., the complaints are the same. It's not unreasonable to say that there should be restrictions on the use and removal of mineral fibers. Until there are, people should take whatever steps they can to avoid exposure.

The people who make and sell

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander





fiberglass are guilty of foisting something on us—all in the name of greed—that was known to be hazardous. For them to continue to claim that fiberglass presents no health hazards is predictable; for us to believe these claims is stupid.

**Robert Horowitz**  
Director, Victims of Fiberglass  
Bryte, Calif.

## Victimized

As a representative of the North American Insulation Manufacturers Association (NAIMA), I was concerned after reading "Fiberglass, the asbestos of the '90s" because it contains numerous and serious inaccuracies about the health aspects of fiberglass. As a result, it is misleading and fails to provide an objective overview of the subject.

For the record, fiberglass insulation products have the advantage of being the most thoroughly tested and analyzed insulation products on the market today. The weight of the scientific evidence, compiled over more than 50 years by industry, government and independent research facilities, has not shown an association between exposure to fiberglass and cancer or non-malignant respiratory disease in humans. In fact, in the most recently completed review of the available scientific evidence regarding fiberglass, researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health concluded that "taken together, the data indicate that among those occupationally exposed, glass fibers do not appear to increase the risk of respiratory system cancer."

It might interest you to know that the Victims of Fiberglass (VOF) organization cited in the article has historically been tied to manufacturers of a competing insulation product, known as cellulose, which is chemically treated shredded paper. In fact, the founder and former chairman of VOF, Richard Munson, left the group in 1994 to return to actively selling cellulose and to his previous position as chairman of the Cellulose Marketing Council. In

addition, despite repeated calls for testing by the Insulation Contractors of America Association, cellulose manufacturers have refused to conduct research on the potential health effects of their product.

Based on the scientific evidence, NAIMA and its member companies are confident that fiberglass products are safe to manufacture, install and use when manufacturers' recommended work practices are followed.

**Catherine L. Imus**  
Director, Communications  
North American Insulation  
Manufacturers Association  
Alexandria, Va.

*Joel Bleifuss replies: Imus casts doubt on my story by stating that it contains "numerous and serious inaccuracies." But she fails to cite a single one. Imus also mentions the clean bill of health fiberglass received in the "most recently completed review of the available scientific evidence" by researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health. I would be impressed, except for the fact that this so-called review fails to examine published work by those scientists whose research has shown fiberglass to be carcinogenic. This glaring omission is perhaps explained by the fact that the Harvard study was supported by a grant from the North American Insulation Manufacturers Association. A more inclusive and objective review of fiberglass research was published in 1994 by Peter F. Infante, an epidemiologist at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Infante concluded that fiberglass "deserves to be listed" in the National Toxicology Program's Annual Report on Carcinogens as a "likely human carcinogen."*

*Finally, I did know that the founder of Victims of Fiberglass was connected to the cellulose insulation industry, which is the green alternative to fiberglass. In fact, the group's current director, Robert Horowitz, a former journalist with no ties to cellulose manufacturing, told me that everywhere he makes a public appearance someone from the North American Insulation Manufacturers Association shows up*

*to make that point. This was interesting, but I didn't have room for that information in my story. Nor did I have room to mention that some of the corporations that are so busy defending the unrestricted use of fiberglass are the same companies that spent years trying to prove that their asbestos insulation did not cause cancer.*

## World beater

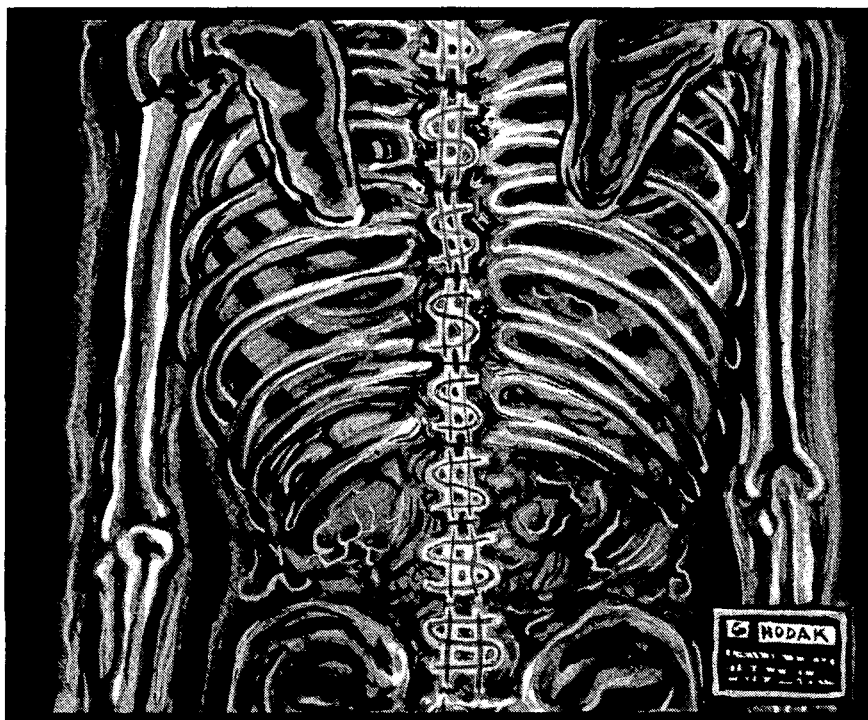
I appreciated Betsy Hartmann's story on the U.N. Women's Conference in China ("Women of the world," October 2). However, she offered the puzzling comment that the "Clinton administration ... has yet to ratify the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" (CEDAW). The president has the authority to negotiate treaties such as CEDAW, but only the U.S. Senate has the power to ratify them.

In that regard, one Jesse Helms lately has been blocking all ambassadorial appointments and treaty ratifications in his role as Senate Foreign Relations Committee chair. Perhaps the U.N. Convention is not, strictly speaking, a treaty. Or perhaps it is somehow bottled up in the executive branch rather than in Helms' committee. Curious readers want to know.

**Ron Legro**  
Milwaukee

*Betsy Hartmann replies: Mr. Legro is correct to point out that it is not the Clinton administration that is holding up CEDAW. I apologize for not recognizing the error, which was introduced during the editing process. The treaty is still before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Last year it did not move out of committee because of the deciding negative vote of Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS). However, the Clinton administration can be criticized for not pushing more aggressively for its passage. The administration has claimed CEDAW is a high priority, but according to observers in Washington, there has not been much action to back up the words.*

# INSHORT



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## KNIFE IN THE BACK

**E**arly this year a little-known federal agency with a paltry budget made a declaration that had physicians, insurers and everyone who's ever had a backache sitting up to listen: The vast majority of the more than 250,000 lower-back surgeries performed each year are unnecessary. A combination of bed rest, painkillers and mild exercise could prove safer and more effective than surgery. Since the announcement, the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (AHCPR), whose mission is to "enhance the quality, appropriateness, and effectiveness of health care services," has been fighting for its life. With surgeons, managed-care organizations (MCOs) and insurers clamoring to see the agency's funding gutted, the slash-happy Republicans are ready to listen. If the House version of the federal budget is approved, the AHCPR will see its \$169 million budget cut by more than 50 percent.

Before the creation of the AHCPR in 1989, clinical practice guidelines were usually issued by medical societies. But the money associated with a procedure like lower-back surgery—at \$11,000 a pop, the 250,000 yearly surgeries could bring in an estimated \$2.75 billion—provided a powerful disincentive for low-cost recommendations such as bed rest. Given this potential conflict



By David Futrelle

## Hanging together

An aide to a British Home Office minister has proposed a strange new way to save lives: hanging the innocent. Arguing for the restoration of capital punishment, Conservative MP Dr. Robert Spink suggested that mistakes in the execution of executions were no big deal, London's



*Daily Telegraph* reports. "I do not expect we would ever hang an innocent person,"

Spink explained, "but even if we did I would still be happy to vote for hanging because someone has to protect the maximum number of people in society."

## My way

Perhaps hoping to rinse away his rather conservative image, San Francisco Mayor Frank Jordan recently allowed himself to be coaxed



into a shower with two local disc jockeys, displaying every inch of

his undeniably pasty flesh to photographers and offering up a rendition of Frank Sinatra's "My Way" to radio



listeners. Pictures of the mayor with his showering companions graced both local newspapers the next day. The reviews of Jordan's performance were not encouraging. As the *San Francisco Chronicle* delicately put it, "No one among Jordan's foes or the city's political consultant cadre ... thought Jordan had made a resoundingly wise move when he lathered up." And a former political aide remarked that he hadn't thought Jordan "had the genitalia to get in the shower with two strangers." But Jordan is convinced the stunt will gain him votes. "I think [voters] will be happy to vote for a mayor who would take a shower with strangers," he cheerfully told the press.

## Air sickness

After being charged with drunkenly assaulting a flight attendant on a flight from Argentina, "defecating on a service cart used by the flight crew" and "track[ing] feces through-



out the aircraft," business executive and Third World debt expert Gerard

Finneran has been barred from flying on commercial aircraft. If it's any consolation, he doesn't do this sort of thing all the time. Finneran's lawyer notes his client has "racked up 5 million frequent flyer miles without an incident," Reuters reports.

of interest between providers and patients, objective information about common medical procedures was scarce. Indeed, Dr. David Eddy, a health care researcher at Duke University, has estimated that up to 80 percent of commonly accepted medical practices have never been objectively evaluated for efficacy and safety across broad populations.

Over the last six years, the AHCPR has spent just \$500,000 to \$1 million per guideline to develop standardized procedures in the treatment of acute pain, prostate disease, back problems and stroke-related afflictions, among other conditions. To evaluate procedures, the AHCPR relies on panels made up of practitioners, researchers and at least one consumer affected by the condition being studied. Because the panels are not "the pet creation of a group of interested providers," says Dr. Robert Keller, a member of the AHCPR panel that worked on the lower-back pain guidelines, they are free of most of the conflicts of interest that plague physician-controlled review boards.

If the lobbyists get their way and the House budget passes, the agency will have enough money to wind down work in progress, but not to pursue serious research. But the real losers will be individual patients. Physicians will continue to perform operations on patients who may or may not be getting the treatment they need. Even more alarming is the prospect that American health care procedures will be shaped by corporations interested solely in increasing profits. Contrary to what one executive at a Texas MCO wrote, "The unfettered free market" is not the right place for health care decisions to be made.

—Steve Hirsch

## THE THALIDOMIDE REVIVAL

For years, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has taken a permissive attitude toward the underground sale of promising, but not-yet-approved, AIDS drugs. But when Healing Alternatives, a San Francisco-based drug buyers' club, started selling thalidomide last May, the FDA ordered it to stop.

Thalidomide has an ugly history. Created in the late 1950s, the drug was hailed as a benign, all-purpose sedative. The drug was prescribed widely in Europe, Australia and developing countries, until pregnant women who used it to treat morning sickness began to deliver babies with stunted limbs. Doctors ultimately traced the deformities to the drug. An estimated 7,000 to 12,000 "thalidomide" children were born before the medication was banned worldwide in 1962. Although the drug was never officially approved for use in the United States, some 20 American thalidomide babies were born.

After years on the shelf, thalidomide is being rehabilitated. Researchers have demonstrated that the drug is useful in treating diseases such as arthritis, tuberculosis and leprosy, and Rockefeller University scientists have also suggested a role for thalidomide in the fight against HIV and AIDS. As an AIDS treatment, the drug apparently acts as an appetite enhancer and counteracts "wasting," the rapid and dangerous weight loss that hastens the disease's progress in some 70 to 90 percent of AIDS patients. In test-tube experiments, thalidomide suppressed the growth of the HIV virus itself.

In June, the FDA authorized doctors to prescribe thalidomide for treating AIDS-related mouth and throat ulcers. But approval for treatment of wasting remains distant. Officially, patients with wasting can only get the drug if they qualify for a tightly controlled clinical trial, in which some patients receive the drug and others are given a placebo. "Nobody who has lost over 10 percent of

their body weight in the last six months or so wants to go on a placebo-based trial," says Healing Alternative's director, Matthew Sharp.

In August, Celgene, one of the U.S. companies licensed to run clinical trials of thalidomide, proposed a second trial that drops the placebo component and makes the drug available to "virtually everyone," company president Sol Barer says. According to Sharp, the plan awaits final, but likely approval by the FDA. But Sharp contends that the FDA approval process is too slow. People with AIDS are more interested in being protected by thalidomide than by the FDA, he says. Healing Alternatives (which obtains the drug from sources abroad) counsels its buyers about thalidomide's dangers, which include birth defects and numbness or tingling in the extremities. The club also recommends that female customers undergo frequent pregnancy testing. "It's not like we're doling [thalidomide] out," Sharp says. "We've seen that research has come down this far and we're satisfied that it is a safe enough drug to give people in this venue."

Thus far, there have been no problems with recent pregnancies in the United States. But in Brazil, one of the world's largest producers of thalidomide and the primary source for Healing Alternatives' supply, a new crop of thalidomide babies appeared in the 1990s, after physicians started prescribing the drug for widespread use against leprosy.

For its part, the FDA remains concerned about the uncontrolled dissemination of such a potentially devastating substance. "We don't want to come in like big thugs," says FDA spokesperson Ivy Kupec, "but history has shown us that HIV-positive women do get pregnant."

And although thalidomide holds promise for AIDS patients, consumer groups such as Public Citizen back the FDA's stance. After all, they warn, thalidomide's own history attests to the danger of allowing insufficiently tested drugs onto the market. Until research proves the drug to be safe and effective against wasting, says Public Citizen's Larry Sasich, guerilla sales are inadvisable. "The only thing you are offering a patient is risk."

—Anna Snider

## THE CORPORATE CURRICULUM

**T**hanks to Whittle Communications' 6-year-old "Channel One," the 10-minute "educational" newscast that includes two minutes of commercials, hucksterism has taken root in classrooms across America. Whittle offers schools access to video equipment in exchange for the opportunity to air his company's pitches to the prized demographic of school-aged youth. Now many corporations have followed Whittle's lead by supplying their own materials directly to underfunded schools. "Across the board, companies are offering schools free teaching aids and free equipment in exchange for using corporate materials," says Charlotte Baecher, the director of Consumers Union's Education Services Department, which last April issued a report on the commercialization of American schools.

When Whittle began distributing Channel One, most educators dismissed the influence of school commercialization as harmless. Critics, however, charge its cumulative effect has been anything but. One 1993 study by the University of Massachusetts found disproportionate use of Channel One in the country's poorest schools. "The schools with the most minimal resources are, therefore, the most overburdened" with educational "aids" such as the mock hot dog machines and soda fountains provided by the fast-food chain Circle K, charges

## MEDIA WATCH

By Jennifer Gonnerman

### The counterfeminist mystique

Here's a media pop quiz: What does it take to start a "wave of counterfeminism"? Answer: A few hundred women, some money from right-wing foundations and a handful of opinion pieces on the nation's most influential op-ed page, the *Wall Street Journal*.

Last May, a *Journal* news story heralded the emergence of five new "pressure groups" that have "sprouted up on the right to support the Republican agenda." Prominent among these groups was the Independent Women's Forum (IWF), a Washington, D.C.-based organization whose elite 500-person membership includes Wendy Lee Gramm, wife of Sen. Phil Gramm, and Lynne Cheney, former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The *Journal* further boosted the group's prominence in an October story headlined "A New Wave of Counterfeminists Is Providing Conservatism With a Sophisticated Female Face" that detailed the IWF's short history. "[The National Organization for Women] doesn't speak for a lot of women," IWF Executive Director Barbara Ledeen explained to the *Journal*. "Traditional feminism has burned out, [and] we've got to get away from the idea of women as victims and whiners."

What these two news stories did not reveal is that the counterfeminist new wave "sprouted up" in the rich soil of the *Journal's* op-ed page. During the last year, the paper has published more than half a dozen op-eds by IWF members bashing liberal feminism, argu-



ing against letting women into the Virginia Military Institute, and calling the "income gap" between genders as the "natural outgrowth of improved opportunities."

For IWF members, all of this exposure has translated into dozens of invitations to appear on talk shows and to testify before Congress. In recent months, IWF members have published opinion pieces in the country's most influential newspapers, including the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*. While not all of the group's members owe their pundit status to the IWF, some of the most visible members may never have had the chance to air their views on national TV if it weren't for the IWF—and the *Journal*. The *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, for example, recently gave IWF Executive Vice President Anita Blair the chance to deliver her "expert" analysis of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. "The exercise took a turn to the radical fringe elements of the United States gender system," she said, "which is simply not going to be helpful to women in the rest of the world."

In addition to publicizing the IWF, the *Journal* has also helped promote the *Women's Quarterly*, an IWF-funded publication. The *Women's Quarterly* has only put out five issues, is just 24 pages long and has a few hundred paid subscribers—but the *Journal's* op-ed page has already printed excerpts from it several times.

The IWF may have 249,500 fewer members than its favorite target—the National Organization for Women—but thanks to all the *Journal's* free publicity, it's now a force in the public opinion wars.

Robin Templeton of the anti-Channel One coalition, UNPLUG.

Despite such objections, the Whittle formula seems to be gaining ground. Whittle Communications estimates that by 1994 up to 12,000 junior high and high schools had agreed to use Channel One's closed-circuit programming. (Critics of Channel One charge that the figure is inflated.) General Mills issues tracts on how "Gushers" fruit snacks resemble volcanoes. The Potato Board and the Snack Food Association offer materials on the history of the potato chip. McDonald's, Kellogg's and Circle K donate treatises on good eating habits. And corporate influence on what children learn doesn't end with ads for products. It extends to a wide range of topics: Exxon doles out teaching aids on environmental issues; Clearasil disseminates a pamphlet on self-esteem; Mobil Oil has even bankrolled a handout on "critical thinking."

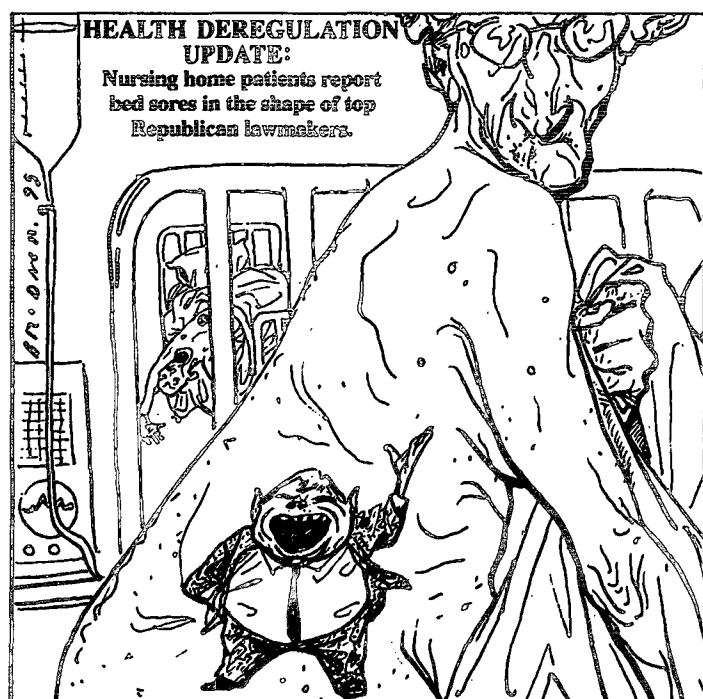
In 1991, Whittle Communications followed up its success with Channel One with a proposal for the Edison Project. The Edison Project envisioned building a chain of for-profit junior high and high schools (which would have brought still more televisions and commercials to the curriculum). Although that initiative failed to find investors, the project was successful in one regard: It made for-profit schools a thinkable policy option. Indeed, regional telephone companies are now exploring the notion of transforming public schools into the for-profit "schools of tomorrow." Not surprisingly, these schools will use electronic messaging, telephonic and information processing services as integral parts of the education process—thus teaching a generation of youngsters to rely on their products.

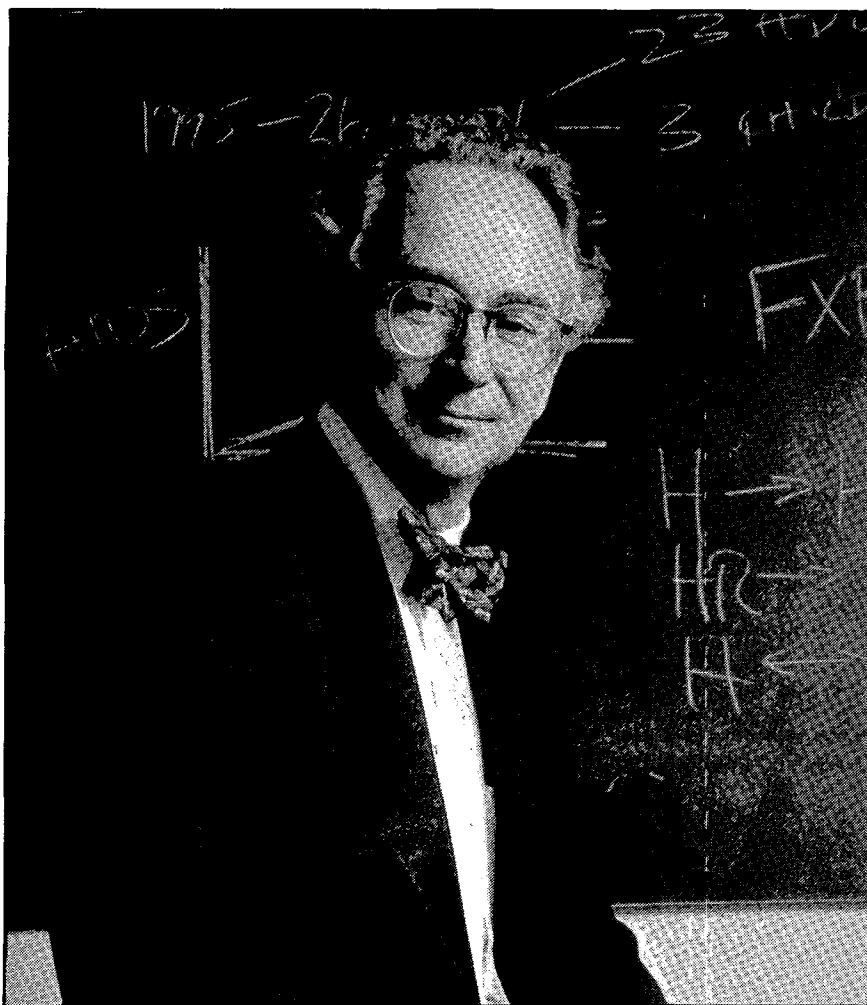
Unless school boards implement a change in policy, says Baecher, who is pushing for the rigorous evaluation of all teaching materials, the link between public education and corporate profit-making schemes may be impossible to break. "With free materials, school boards aren't bound by the same stringent standards of approval as they are with regular teaching materials," she says. "What's surprising is that there hasn't been more outcry over the incursion."

—Alex Molnar

## TOMORROW'S NEWS TONIGHT

By Steve Brodner





## HEALTH OF NATIONS

### *Jonathan Mann links health and human rights*

used to explaining his ideas—not surprising given his many roles at Harvard's School of Public Health. He is director of the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights, professor of epidemiology and international health, director of the International AIDS Center, and editor of the journal *Health and Human Rights*.

Armed with an M.D. from Washington University, a master's of public health from Harvard and seven years as an epidemiologist and chief medical officer with New Mexico's Health and Environment Department, Mann set off to Zaire in 1984 to direct an AIDS research project sponsored by the governments of Zaire, Belgium and the United States. It was the first time he had concentrated on a single disease, and doing so gave him the opportunity to scrape away layers of conventional thinking about the spread and social causes of AIDS.

Mann continued to explore these issues at the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva, where he founded the Global Program on AIDS in 1986. As the program's director, he traveled widely over the next four years, learn-

"We're trying to link together our hearts and our heads," Dr. Jonathan Mann says of "AIDS, Health and Human Rights," an undergraduate course he teaches at Harvard. Mann, 48, talks in the well-shaped paragraphs of someone

ETC.

By Joel Bleifuss

## The people's budget

As Republicans have pushed their budget bills through Congress, they've argued that increased subsidies for the rich—and cuts for everyone else—are needed to stimulate the economy and balance the budget. Any pain produced by the plans is glossed over with the explanation that the GOP is offering the only fiscally responsible budget blueprint in Congress.

But late last month, the 49 members of the House Progressive Caucus presented their alternative to this upward redistribution of wealth, the Corporate Responsibility Act. The caucus proposes, over the next seven years, to cut more than \$800 billion in tax subsidies and other benefits for corporations and the rich. For example, the caucus would:

- Tax foreign-controlled corporations doing business in the United States at the same rate as U.S.-controlled corporations (saving \$200 billion in tax revenues over seven years).
- Eliminate the credit granted multinational corporations for taxes they pay in foreign countries (\$114 billion).
- Cap the home mortgage interest deduction at \$300,000 (\$47 billion).
- Tax capital gains at the same rate as other income (\$63 billion).
- Phase out all government grants for the development of fossil fuels and nuclear energy (\$3.2 billion).
- Discontinue direct and indirect subsidies to foreign purchasers of U.S. defense firm products (\$3.5 billion).
- End taxpayer subsidies of



produce purchased by foreign consumers (\$5.8 billion).

- End advertising subsidies for U.S. businesses that market their products in foreign countries (\$700 million).

The Progressive Caucus is the largest organized group of congressional Democrats, yet for some reason their proposal never made the national news. The only national news outlets to report on the Corporate Responsibility Act were the Associated Press and C-Span. NBC, CNN and the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* all sent camera crews to cover the press conference where the caucus plans were unveiled, but apparently these networks decided the subject wasn't news.

"They all show up and cover this as a news event, and then they lose their nerve," says Progressive Caucus staff coordinator Bill Goold. "The corporate media is not fond of carrying stories that expose billions of dollars in special tax loopholes for many of their own advertisers and sponsors. GE owns NBC, Mickey Mouse owns ABC, and Westinghouse wants to own CBS. They are all beneficiaries of corporate welfare. You don't bite the hand that feeds you or owns you."

According to Goold, the Republicans' success at pushing its legislation is also due to the fact that "the darlings of the right have all kinds of foundations around town that work directly or indirectly for their agenda."

By contrast, the Progressive Caucus operates without a political infrastructure to promote its positions. Goold hopes that will change.

"We have a lot of catching up to do," he says. "The caucus is now nurturing better communication with progressives outside of Congress."

ing from the health workers, drug users, prostitutes and people with AIDS who were on the front lines of the AIDS crisis. Mann saw firsthand the pervasive discrimination toward HIV-infected people, and he became convinced that the stigma they faced was seriously hindering attempts to care for them. "When people are coerced or stigmatized or afraid," he says, "then they really aren't in a good position to do the right thing."

At WHO, Mann worked to develop a set of principles for an AIDS prevention policy that recognizes the role social injustice plays in the spread of the disease. In 1988, he persuaded the World Health Assembly to adopt a declaration affirming that non-discrimination must be an integral part of AIDS-fighting strategies. This was a groundbreaking accomplishment, the first time in history that health and human rights were explicitly linked at a global level.

But Mann soon realized that discrimination was not only a response to HIV infection but also a cause. He came to understand this serendipitously while examining the spread of AIDS in Uganda, where married, monogamous women were increasingly prone to HIV infection. "The first thing I thought was they don't have the information, condoms weren't available—the usual public health responses," Mann says. "But lo and behold, the women knew about condoms, and condoms were available." Ugandan women routinely engaged in unprotected sex with their HIV-positive husbands, Mann and his colleagues learned, because the risks of refusing—violence and divorce—were more immediate than the threat of contracting AIDS.

"That became for me the paradigm," says Mann, "of understanding that people who are not able to protect themselves cannot take advantage of the traditional instruments of public health we make available. All of that becomes irrelevant to someone who cannot make and effectuate a free and informed choice."

Meanwhile, Mann was working on an international analysis of the maturing AIDS epidemic and found that, in time, marginalized and stigmatized groups invariably bore the brunt of the plague. So emerged another core concept, amounting to a revolution in public health thinking: The abuse of human rights greatly increases a society's vulnerability to major threats to health such as AIDS.

"Old-style public health considered the disease to be dynamic and the society to be static," Mann explains, pointing to the United States, where health is thought of primarily in terms of medical care and rarely connected to broader social issues. "Medical care is clearly important, but it's only a thin piece of the pie. People in this country are being hurt in a variety of ways that have nothing to do with medical care, or medical care can't do anything about it, or when it becomes involved, it's very late, and it's really just cleaning up the mess." By contrast, in the new-style public health Mann advocates, "society and health are so interconnected that you cannot talk about a disease without also talking about a society."

In 1990, Mann came to Harvard to create the Bagnoud Center, which sponsors conferences, courses and the journal, all aimed at democratizing health care worldwide. Interlacing health policy and respect for human rights, Mann argues, is central to that task. "Contributing to societal transformation [is] an obligation of public health." It's no small task, but not an impossible one, he insists. Nor is it without its gratifying surprises, as when he learned that his undergraduate course last spring had inspired a few students to go into public health.

—Nan Levinson

# T H E F I R S T S T O N E

## PAVLOV'S PACK RATS

By Joel Bleifuss

A helpful friend enters the kitchen, her hands clutching six empty beer bottles. She asks, "Where do you put your bottles?" I gesture toward the corner. "In the waste basket." She walks over, drops the bottles in and pauses, bearing our collective sin with a moment of loud silence.

I don't sort my waste. I never have. Recycling, as I see it, is just a fancy name for organized littering. In fact, recycling doesn't so much reduce the waste load as redistribute it.

That's a minority opinion. Most people who recycle do so because they think that they're doing something good for the environment. They are deluded. The primary beneficiary of the current recycling fervor is the demon seed of our consumer culture—the packaging industry.

Each year 43 million tons of packaging are thrown into the nation's municipal solid waste system. The share of that waste stream that comes from the food and beverage industry includes 9.5 million tons of glass jars and bottles, 2.2 million tons of plastic containers, 2 million tons of steel cans and 1 million tons of aluminum cans.

The commonsense alternative to producing this mountain of garbage is to switch to reusable packaging. For packaging materials that can't be reused, such as paper boxes, recycling should be mandated. Germany, a pioneer in the field of appropriate packaging, has implemented strict reuse and recycling legislation. More than 70 percent of beverages served in Germany are poured from reused glass bottles. Less than 1 percent of beverage bottles in the United States are reused.

Of course, if German-style reuse measures became law here, the packaging and waste industries would lose a huge volume of their business. Further, multinational food and beverage conglomerates, which are highly centralized operations, would then bear the logistical burden of handling their returned containers. Consequently, those industries strongly oppose any legislation that curtails packaging.

In 1992 the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group,

an affiliate of Ralph Nader's PIRG network, put a moderate measure on the state ballot that would have cut down on wasteful packaging and promoted reuse. But the packaging, petrochemical and food industries mounted a \$5.6 million campaign against the measure, which lost by a 59-to-41 percent margin. Prominent contributors to the campaign included Dow Chemical, which spent \$230,000; Exxon, \$195,000; the Society of Plastic Industries, \$252,000; Mobil Oil, \$128,000; Procter & Gamble, \$110,000; and Quaker Oats, \$75,000.

Despite their opposition to the Massachusetts measure, these companies all claim to support recycling. But they only support recycling that is voluntary and does not involve restrictions on packaging material.

The manifesto of corporate recycling is *In Defense of Garbage*, a 1993 book by Judd H. Alexander, a former vice presi-

dent of American Can Co., which he frankly describes as "a major producer of garbage products." Alexander boasts that American Can was inspired by the first Earth Day in 1970 and has since become "an experienced recycler." There is money to be made in recycling, he asserts—especially when municipal governments pay industry to use recycled raw materials.

"With support from the media, a long-term change in behavior patterns on the part of the public may be in process," writes Alexander. After all, it is more profitable for the affected industries to alter consumer behavior than to change their manufacturing and distribution processes.

Take the example of Keep America Beautiful (KAB), an industry front group that Alexander formerly headed. KAB is featured in the *Greenpeace Guide to Anti-Environmental Organizations*. Each year about 200 "garbage product" companies contribute about \$2 million to KAB in order to wage war against "litter." Media corporations, for their part, donate tens of millions more in free advertising time.

In addition to opposing litter, KAB is also against state and local legislation that would mandate a 5 cent deposit on returnable containers. In fact, many of the same companies that helped defeat the Massachusetts anti-packaging initiative also fund KAB. As Greenpeace sees it, the group's underlying message is simply that individuals, not corporations, are "the ones responsible for this trash, and that they must solve the problem of litter by changing their habits."

In fact, KAB has sought "scientific" ways to stop litterbugs. According to Alexander, in 1976 the organization hired a team of behavioral scientists who devised "a campaign to change the normative behavior of communities in regard to this slovenly practice." Part of that behavior modification included KAB experts helping local law enforcement officials



develop "a code of practical and effective litter ordinances."

Not surprisingly, KAB is now employing its behavioral scientists to promote "recycling education"—a campaign vital to the continued financial health of the garbage producers. One of the strengths of recycling, according to Alexander, is that "people feel good about their participation."

In many ways, recycling can be seen as a perverse form of penance in which individual recyclers absolve themselves from participation in an environmentally destructive culture. Even the normally savvy *E* magazine confuses these psychic benefits for environmental progress.

The August 1995 *E* featured an interesting report on the ecological virtues of reuse. Unfortunately, the magazine then undercut its message with profiles of four "radical recyclers." "The serious environmentalist is green all the way through, not just on the surface," explained *E* in the introduction to the profiles. "These paragons can inspire and instruct us with their stories." *E* goes on to explain how "these paragons" have devoted their lives to not "producing" garbage, totally missing the fact that individuals in their homes are not garbage "producers." Garbage is produced by corporations.

"There's a whole lot that can be done for the environment," says Brian Crandall, whose family throws out only 18 30-gallon bags of garbage each year. "You can do something about it or you can do nothing. It's an individual choice."

Individual actions are also a top priority of Cindy and Chris Burger, whose family's recycling efforts have been touted in *Good Housekeeping* and *Family Circle*. Cindy, who works in a medical office, is militant. As she explains to *E*, "They toss out paper clips in my office, and I yell at them, 'Hey, that affects the bottom line!' It drives me crazy."

Cindy and Chris—like the American Can Co.—were inspired to become recyclers during the first Earth Day in 1970. "We were both in college, and we were protesting against what the big, bad companies were doing," says Chris. "We started to think about what we as individuals could do to change things. The biggest opportunity was in the waste we were producing."

*E* reports that the Burgers, who live in a Mongolian yurt that Chris built, "produce" 3 pounds of garbage per year, in contrast to the 6,000 pounds a year that *E* says the average American family "produces."

*E* reporters Carol Leonetti and Jim Moravalli go on to write, without a

hint of irony, "[The Burgers'] little garbage bags—filled with cut credit cards, empty toothpaste tubes, used-up pens and, yes, potato chip bags—are going to the Smithsonian Institution to be put on permanent display, right next to the Enola Gay."

I don't mean to say that individual actions do not count. Obviously they do—if directed at the right target. Take the international crusade against McDonald's. Several years ago a campaign by the Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste effectively forced McDonald's to stop using styrofoam packaging. And the action against the corporation continues today. David Briars, of Craftsbury, Vt., heads the U.S. effort to support two British anarchists whom McDonald's is suing for allegedly libelous claims about the company's environmentally wasteful practices.

"What we need is decycling, not recycling," says Briars. "It's amazing how bright, new ideas are seized upon by the profiteers. Recycling is a great idea in a certain context, but now it means collecting bottles that take a lot of resources and energy to make, breaking them up into a substitute for sand and making asphalt. It's ridiculous. We need glass either not to be made, or to be reused."

In short, if people would spend as much time exercising their collective will, as they do contemplating their own garbage, the world would be a better place. ▲

## THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

by Peter Hannan



**HEALTH**

# The enemy within

**I**t's not often that ordinary Americans get to confront a corporate CEO. But two months ago the studio audience of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* found itself face to face with Richard Hazelton, the CEO of Dow Corning, maker of the silicone gel breast implants that many women believe are making them sick.

*Armed with suspect research, industry is whitewashing the dangers of silicone breast implants.*

By Ben Lilliston

In May, Dow Corning—facing a flood of lawsuits from women with breast implants—had filed for bankruptcy protection. And Hazelton, eager to defend the safety of implants, agreed to appear on *Oprah*.

Hazelton began the show looking calm and confident, but as he came under fire from women in the audience, it quickly became clear that he was out of his element. Slumped uncomfortably in his chair, an anguished expression on his face, Hazelton glanced toward the ceiling and

pleaded with the people in the studio and beyond. "We need to keep this discussion on a level that gets beyond the anger," he said, "because what we really need to understand is the facts."

Laura Bowden, a 31-year-old organizer of the Illinois-based Breast Implant Information Network, responded to Hazelton's plea by explaining the facts of her case. "I got implants in 1990," Bowden said. "I was always a very healthy woman, never a problem. Four months later a series of problems started." Bowden looked directly at Hazelton. "It's not an open wound, so you can't see the pain. It's like you are dying from the inside out. ... I got them out and I got better."

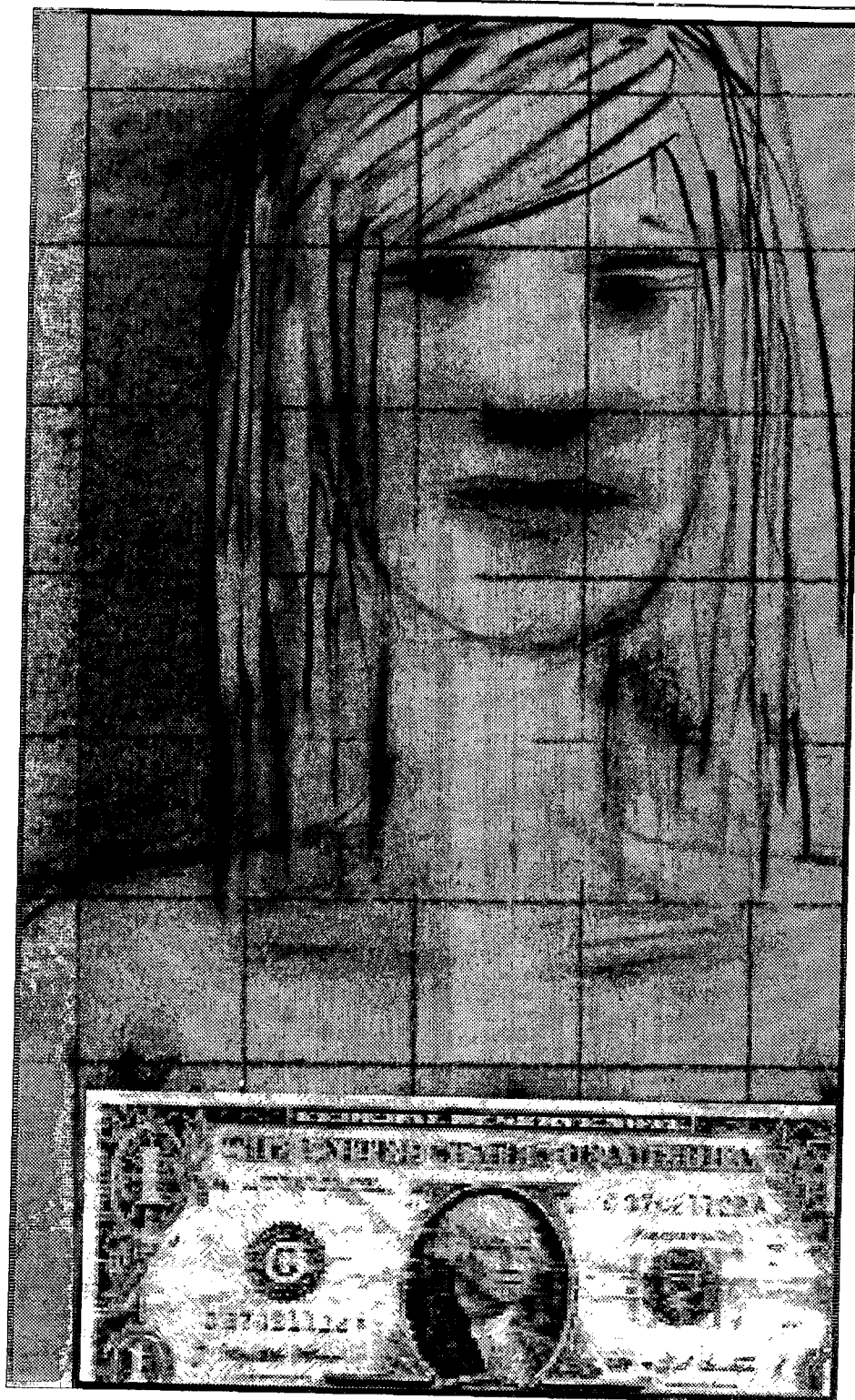
There are thousands of women like Bowden who believe that implants poisoned their bodies from within. Altogether, approximately 400,000 of the 1 million women who received implants have joined a class-action suit against Dow Corning and other implant manufacturers. When the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) placed a volun-

tary ban on the devices in 1992, a slew of horror stories appeared about women disabled by leaking silicone. Their disorders ranged from persistent pain to chronic fatigue; in extreme cases, silicone gel appeared to migrate throughout the body, debilitating women to the point that they could scarcely move. But recently, public attention has been shifting away from the stories of women with implants, and onto "greedy plaintiffs lawyers" who are waging a legal battle against implant makers.

Though Hazelton had trouble delivering this message on *Oprah*, he found a more receptive audience on Capitol Hill. Speaking before the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight in August, he argued that shoddy anecdotal evidence has been driving the lawsuits against his company. "The story of breast implants," Hazelton charged, "clearly shows the consequences when the powerful influence of billion-dollar litigation trumps risk evaluations based on science." And there is no denying that Dow Corning, which is jointly owned by Dow Chemical and Corning Inc., has assembled a substantial body of evidence discounting claims that breast implants are causing women to be sick. The company points to no less than 18 studies that it says show there is no link between silicone gel breast implants and a host of illnesses reported by women.

Many of these studies were done by some of the nation's leading research institutions, and have received respectful play in the media. In June, the *New York Times* ran a lengthy front-page article arguing that "there is no evidence that breast implants are harmful." The article all but indicted trial lawyers for filing claims that had no foundation in scientific research. Just last month, *60 Minutes* ran a story on breast implants that excluded interviews with affected





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woman and focused solely on the attorneys representing them. Recent media coverage creates the unmistakable impression that most research indicates that breast implants are, at worst, a minimal hazard to women.

But do breast implants really have a clean bill of health? A critical review of the research shows that many supposedly "independent" studies were funded by breast implant makers, including Dow Corning; that many key implant

researchers have worked for implant manufacturers; and that design flaws in most of these studies are so severe that they practically predetermined their outcome.

The implant industry's ability to reframe the controversy over breast implants raises troubling questions about the way scientific research is conducted in the United States—and reveals the willingness of news outlets to uncritically report results from studies that are far from conclusive.

The new wave of research boasts an impressive pedigree. Perhaps the most influential study on implants thus far was published this June in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The study, conducted by researchers from the Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, "found no association between breast implants and the connective-tissue diseases and other disorders that were studied." Initiated in 1992, researchers sent questionnaires to 86,318 nurses, 1,183 of whom had silicone gel implants, making this the largest implant study completed to date.

"This study should reassure women with breast implants that they are not at substantially increased risk of connective-tissue disease compared to other women," Dr. Matthew Liang, co-author of the study, said at the time.

A year earlier, the *New England Journal of Medicine* published a study conducted at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., that looked at 749 women with breast implants, and compared them with 1,498 women who did not have breast implants. Like the Harvard researchers, they had found "no association between breast implants and the connective-tissue diseases and other disorders that were studied."

The mainstream media widely heralded both these studies as compelling proof that silicone implants do not cause illness in women. But few reporters have discussed the serious problems that other researchers have identified in the studies. Perhaps the most significant problem is their time frame. Most researchers who have studied women with implants say that it usually takes 10 years or more for symp-

toms to develop. In the Mayo Clinic study, women had the implants in for a mean of 7.8 years. In the Harvard study the mean was 9.9 years.

"It's easy to get a negative study; you just look too soon," explains Shanna Swan, an epidemiologist from the University of California at Berkeley School of Public Health. "Their designs are like looking for lung cancer in [smokers] who are in their mid-30s. You're not going to find anything."

"These things are slowly developing diseases," says Dr. Douglas Shanklin, a pathologist at the University of Tennessee who has been studying implants for the last decade. Since only about a third of all women who have silicone gel implants have had them for more than 10 years (and far fewer have had them for more than 20 years), it is very difficult to gauge their long-term health effects. "Neither of the two widely hyped studies lasted long enough," says Shanklin. "They simply weren't over a proper time frame to begin to pick up the signs of these diseases."

Also, to conduct an accurate study, you have to know what symptoms to look for. According to Shanklin, the researchers at Harvard and the Mayo Clinic "have been looking for the wrong diseases." Shanklin notes that both studies look for traditional connective-tissue diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, which, respectively, affect the joints and skin. But Shanklin argues that women with breast implants are reporting illnesses that don't fit the standard diagnoses. He believes they are experiencing atypical forms of connective-tissue disease, largely because the body is reacting to the introduction of a foreign substance. Implant-related conditions seem to produce flu-like symptoms, with aches, pains and extreme fatigue. Because these symptoms are associated with a variety of illnesses, they don't neatly fit a single diagnosis.

The story of Kay Dlugopolski, who now works with the Illinois-based Breast Implant Information Network, is fairly typical. An extremely active person, Dlugopolski regularly biked more than 25 miles. In 1989, she learned she had breast cancer and had a mastectomy, followed by chemotherapy. A few days after her final chemotherapy treatment, Dlugopolski was back riding her bike. Although she limited herself to a few miles at first, Dlugopolski quickly got stronger.

In January 1990, Dlugopolski got her first silicone implant. She began biking again in the spring, but by September Dlugopolski could no longer continue. In May, she began to feel sharp pains in the joints of her hands. The pain became so acute that she could no longer grip the handlebars of her bike. She also began to feel shooting pains in her shoulders; her doctor diagnosed rheumatoid arthritis. She got medication for the arthritis, but other health problems, including extreme fatigue, persisted. Her fatigue, and the growing publicity about the hazards of the implants, convinced Dlugopolski to get them removed in 1993.

"When my medical problems started, I hadn't even

heard about the huge implant settlements," Dlugopolski says. "I was looking for answers, a diagnosis, a treatment." Soon after her implants were removed, she began to feel better. Although she takes medication to relieve the pain in her joints, she still feels fatigued much of the time. "I feel that I survived cancer only to be plagued by silicone implants now and for the rest of my life," she says.

The pattern in cases like Dlugopolski's is not unprecedented. According to Swan, "Usually when you have a new toxic exposure that the body is not used to, the body responds in new ways, such as toxic shock syndrome caused by DES," a hormone used to prevent miscarriages, which was banned by the FDA in 1971. Swan believes the Harvard and Mayo Clinic studies were fatally flawed because "researchers were looking for the traditional connective-tissue diseases, despite the fact that many, many case reports suggest that there is a new disease here."

The Harvard and Mayo studies also have their own unique peculiarities that make their results questionable. The Mayo Clinic's control group consisted of other patients at the clinic, who were clearly more likely than healthy subjects to have diseases similar to those afflicting women with implants. In fact, three of the 10 women with connective-tissue disease in the non-breast implant control group had ankylosing spondylitis, an extremely rare inherited disease. Having these women in the control group skewed the comparison to women with implants.

Meanwhile, the Harvard study, which many journalists have touted as the definitive word on silicone gel implants, has its own serious oversights. Of the 1,183 women with implants who were included in the study, only 876 had silicone gel implants; 307 of the women had implants made with saline or other substances. Why these 307 women were included in the study is a question that has puzzled many critics.

Unfortunately, the lead researchers from the Harvard and Mayo studies are no longer responding to media queries about their work. They say the publicity has resulted in harassment from plaintiffs lawyers. The researchers have complained that the attorneys have launched spurious attacks on their methodology and unfairly questioned their ties to Dow Corning and other implant manufacturers. But a close examination of their links to implant makers suggests the charges have substance.

The Mayo Clinic study was funded in part by the Plastic Surgeons Education Foundation, a group that receives funding from breast implant manufacturers, including Dow Corning. In addition, Mayo researchers did not disclose that the Mayo Foundation, which runs the clinic, was a defendant in a silicone gel breast implant case when the study was published.

The Harvard study was funded by the National Institutes of Health. But it, too, suffered from significant, if less immediately obvious, conflicts of interest. Three of the study's six authors, Dr. Jorge Sanchez-Guerrero, Dr. Graham Colditz



and Dr. Matthew Liang, were either personally receiving money from breast implant manufacturers for their work on other studies, or had agreed to act as consultants for implant makers while the study was under way. In late 1994, Dr. Liang resigned from a second study on implants because he felt his work as a paid consultant for Dow Corning created "the appearance of a conflict of interest." That study, known as the Women's Cohort Study, was funded directly by Dow Corning, which had contributed \$6.2 million to Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Implant activists and plaintiffs attorneys are alleging that many of the same conflicts of interest exist in the Women's Cohort Study. Only this time, they argue that the implant industry is burying unfavorable test results: The study's 1993 interim findings, which analyzed some 212,500 women, disclosed that women with implants might be up to 59 percent more likely to develop rheumatoid arthritis than women without implants. Although the study is designed to add another 200,000 women, the 1993 interim report examines by far the largest number of women yet to be studied. Because the research is still ongoing, Dow Corning will not comment on the interim findings. The study is expected to be completed in early 1996.

The research institutions offer only guarded comment on the study. "That was an interim report based on only half the sample," says Brigham and Women's Hospital spokeswoman Terri Hornbach-Torres. "Once the study is complete, the numbers could reverse themselves. It's misleading to take that information and to assume that that's credible scientific information."

Not surprisingly, many implant activists are skeptical about Dow Corning's involvement in the study. Hornbach-Torres admits that Dow Corning looked at the questionnaire being used in the Women's Cohort study before it was sent out to women, but she insists that the company has "no influence over that protocol at all."

Mainstream media coverage notwithstanding, the Harvard and Mayo studies are, fortunately, not the last word in implant research. Other, more independent, studies have taken a dramatically different approach to the research—and have begun to identify a suggestive link between silicone implants and illnesses. Harvard and Mayo researchers conducted broad epidemiological studies that presumed women with implants would only be suffering from a few specific diseases. But researchers such as the University of Tennessee's Shanklin have directly studied women who have implants to determine how the body is reacting to the silicone. Shanklin and a colleague at Tennessee, Dr. David Smalley, have published several important studies in peer-reviewed journals this year describing this reaction. Their article in a recent issue of the *International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology* looked at 50 women with silicone implants. All 50 had developed an immune response to silicone not found in women without implants.

Dr. Nir Kossovsky, at the University of California at Los

Angeles, has found anti-silicone-specific antibodies in women with implants. Dr. Kossovsky, who has been studying silicone since 1981, has researched how silicone reacts with proteins in the body and causes a change in their structure. These abnormal proteins stimulate the antibody.

Kossovsky believes that "we have enough data to state that silicone causes disease in women." But he admits that the research is still incomplete. "The science is rudimentary in connecting clinical conditions to the expected epidemiological phenomenon. It is on that basis that the debate falls."

Even so, a workshop on silicone immunology sponsored by the National Institutes of Health in March disclosed results that seemed to bear out the findings of Shanklin and Kossovsky. Ninety percent of the studies presented at the workshop found evidence of immunological problems linked to the implantation of silicone devices.

The risks suggested by these studies become explosive for implant manufacturers when viewed alongside research indicating that implants leak much more frequently than their makers have maintained. The 1972 insert for Dow Corning breast implants claimed that the implants should last a lifetime. "However," the insert warned, "since no mammary prosthesis has been implanted for a full lifespan it is impossible to give an unequivocal answer." Currently, Dow Corning is reporting that the rupture rate for implants is less than 5 percent.

However, Dr. Gordon Robinson, a plastic surgeon from

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Birmingham, Ala., recently conducted a study examining the removed breast implants from 300 patients. In this sample, a remarkable 71.3 percent of the patients had either a full rupture or partial leak or both, in one or both of their implants. Of the 592 implants removed from the 300 patients, 63.5 percent had severely ruptured or begun leaking.

"We found that the implants wear out, and in a very predictable time frame," Dr. Robinson says. "I think there's no question about it. At eight years, roughly 80 percent of them are OK. At 14 years, roughly 80 percent of them had a disruption on one side or the other. After 20 years, basically everybody has problems."

Similar studies have produced similar results. A 1993 study in the journal *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* found that women who had implants for 1 to 9 years experienced a 35.7 percent rupture rate, and in implants that had been in place for 10 to 17 years, 95.7 percent had either ruptured or were leaking silicone. Another study in 1994, published in the *Annals of Plastic Surgery*, found that 25 percent had ruptured in the first 10 years, and 53 percent in the first 25 years. Even Stephanie Burns, Dow Corning's scientific liaison to the FDA, admits that once the silicone leaks, it "can migrate." Dr. Shanklin has autopsied women where he found remnants of silicone in the brain, the wrist and even the knee.

Some the most damning studies concerning silicone implants have come from within the implant industry itself. According to recent court documents, Dow Chemical conducted hundreds of tests on laboratory animals in the '50s proving that silicone causes adverse health effects. Unpublished Dow Corning studies uncovered by the FDA in the late '80s showed cancerous tumors appearing in rats when implanted with silicone. This research, like all the other Dow Corning and Dow Chemical studies, was never published.

Rep. James Traficant (D-OH) noted many of these internal studies when he called on the Justice Department in June to investigate whether Dow Corning officials had perjured themselves during testimony before Congress in December 1990. Company officials had claimed under oath that Dow Corning had not suppressed information on the dangers of silicone implants. The Justice Department is currently looking at Traficant's allegations, although they have not officially opened an investigation. A five-year statute of limitations governs the charge of perjury before Congress, so the Justice Department will have to take action by December.

Action on the scientific front, however, may be picking up. The National Cancer Institute has just begun the biggest epidemiological study to date, involving some 9,000 women who have had their implants for at least 10 years. The study will look at a number of health effects, including connective-tissue disease. And the American College of Rheumatology (ACR), a professional group of doctors who study and treat connective-tissue disorders, has set up a spe-

cial "Silicone-Related Disorders Study Group" to better define what symptoms these women are experiencing. Once this set of criteria is established, it will provide a guide for future epidemiological studies of silicone implants.

Even within the college, however, many researchers remain hostile to the idea that implants are causing illness. In late October at the college's annual meeting in San Francisco, the ACR's directors issued a statement claiming that existing evidence clearly shows that implants do not cause rheumatic diseases. The directors blasted the FDA and the court system for relying on anecdotal evidence. But other rheumatologists at the conference blasted back. Critics noted that 16 of 18 implant studies presented at the conference indicated that there are links between implants and certain illnesses in women.

But many women with implants are not waiting for the results from future scientific studies. Using a number of unorthodox tactics, they have banded together to fight Dow Corning and other implant manufacturers. In a September meeting with Justice Department officials concerning Traficant's allegations, one woman stood up and lifted up her shirt to show a group of stunned Justice Department lawyers the criss-cross of scars that disfigured her chest after her ruptured implants were removed.

On September 18, hundreds of women rallied outside Congress and called for a boycott of products manufactured by implant makers. The women urged the public to boycott all products made by Dow Chemical and Corning Inc., 3M and Bristol-Myers Squibb. "This is about corporate responsibility," said Suzie Cunningham, an Ohio breast implant activist. "We are going to use our consumer voice until [implant manufacturers] accept that." According to Christy Warshaw, of the Silicone Alliance Network for Education, an estimated 150 support groups involving some 70,000 American women are building a network to put pressure on the implant industry. Representatives from many of these groups are going to meet in Chicago next month to try and better coordinate their efforts.

So far, Dow Corning has tried to avoid open confrontation with these organizations. As Hazelton told Oprah, "We are sensitive to women who are ill, and to their concerns, to their sincerely held beliefs about our product, and, yes, to their anger. At the same time we believe, based on sound science, in our product. ... It becomes very difficult to try to communicate that, particularly in an atmosphere driven by fear and anger."

But Peggy Pardo, of the Breast Implant Information Network, says, "We have every right to be angry and fearful of the future. ... There are tons and tons of women who are sick, and are continuing to get sick. He wants us to go away, and we're not." ◀

Ben Lilliston is publications director of the Cancer Prevention Coalition and former associate editor of the *Corporate Crime Reporter*.



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**L A B O R**

# Heeding the call

**T**here was no punch to the jaw, no walkout and schism, as there was 60 years ago. At that fateful 1935 convention of the American Federation of Labor, fiery Mineworkers leader John L. Lewis broke ranks with other unions to launch the CIO campaign to organize industrial workers. Yet this year's lively, but less explosive, convention may also herald another rebirth of organized labor in this country.

*The election of John Sweeney as AFL-CIO president could usher in a new age of labor militancy.*

By David Moberg  
NEW YORK

Echoing Lewis' words from years ago, United Mine Workers Vice President Cecil Roberts urged union delegates last month to "heed the call" of America's working men and women to bring new leadership to the AFL-CIO. The crowd, many wearing red "new voice" T-shirts or waving signs for "change," broke out in a chant of "heed the call," an outburst of enthusiasm worlds away from the mood of ritual

consent in previous conventions.

Shortly afterward, the delegates did heed the call. In the first open contest for labor's top leadership since a socialist mineworker briefly toppled Samuel Gompers a century ago, the convention elected 61-year-old Service Employees International Union (SEIU) President John J. Sweeney as president by a margin of 56 percent. Also on the "new voice" slate were Mineworkers President Richard Trumka, who was elected secretary-treasurer, and AFSCME Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson, who filled the newly created post of executive vice president. Chavez-Thompson, who grew up and worked in Texas, is the first person of color to serve as a top executive in the U.S. labor movement.

Though the outcome had seemed likely since last spring, incumbent Thomas R. Donahue's campaign swung the Carpenters away from the Sweeney camp at the last minute and worked hard to woo other building trades. But the "new voice" forces had out-organized Donahue's team. The die was cast on the first day of the convention when union presidents with a majority of delegates signed a letter of support for Sweeney; the same day, the Sweeney bloc also won the first roll call vote on a parliamentary issue.

With his little Buddha-like smile, jowly round face beneath a white-fringed bald head, and subdued, mild-mannered speech, Sweeney is stylistically the antithesis of the volcanic Lewis. Yet Sweeney, who has served as president of SEIU for 15 years, is intent on launching the most ambitious union organizing drive since the last big push, starting in the late 1930s and extending after the end of World War II. He is likely to give special emphasis to low-wage workers in the broad service sector, where women, blacks, Latinos and new immigrants make up much of the workforce. He also plans to launch a broad-based campaign in the South and to recruit a thousand young people for a "union summer" of organizing in 1996. In a dramatic departure from unions' typical recent strategy of organizing one industry at a time, the new leaders want to mount organizing drives to span entire industries, metropolitan areas or key corporations, such as Wal-Mart.

This new will to organize—and to refine aggressive strategies—comes at the right historical moment. Wages for most workers have been stagnant or declining—despite rising business profits—and blue- and white-collar workers alike face growing job insecurity. "I believe we're on the verge of a real renaissance of the trade union movement," argues recently elected New York City central labor council president Brian McLaughlin. McLaughlin represents the kind of initiative that Sweeney hopes to nurture: He is rejuvenating his own moribund council, which is supposed to



unite all unions in a metropolitan region, with a local institute to train new organizers, a campaign for a minimum "living wage" of \$12 an hour for all city contractors, and coordinated efforts to organize hotel, retail food and garment workers in the city.

Sweeney quickly made clear that he wants to make workers' concerns the center of American politics and economic life. The solution to "shrinking paychecks, disappearing jobs, vanishing health care, increasing inequality and more racism, rancor and resentment," Sweeney told the convention after his election, "is a bigger, stronger labor movement. ... If anyone denies American workers their constitutional right to freedom of association, we will use old-fashioned mass demonstrations as well as sophisticated corporate campaigns to make worker rights the civil rights issue of the 1990s."

While organizing will be the centerpiece of a labor movement makeover, the new leaders also want to increase participation among existing members and recruit more women, young workers and people of color. Sweeney also has dramatic plans for reallocating labor's budget and rearranging its bureaucracy, such as giving more money to the highly successful Organizing Institute and setting up new centers for Strategic Action or Multinational Monitoring, which will devise broad approaches to fighting big corporations and keep tabs on far-flung global enterprises. (See "Getting Organized," October 30.)

But the real difference between Sweeney and Donahue had less to do with such organizational changes and more to do with a willingness to mobilize workers to fight both employers and the political right. Donahue, who took over the federation in July when longtime president Lane Kirkland stepped down, believed that workers don't want to take part in more militant action, and that it would be politically disastrous if they did.

Even before the vote, the leadership moved most unions to endorse organizing and more aggressive political action, while introducing new faces into labor's leadership. In July, the Executive Council elected the first woman AFL-CIO executive, Secretary-Treasurer Barbara Easterling, who was ousted by Trumka in October. Since Donahue had adopted most of Sweeney's platform, organized labor is in principle united on broad strategic goals.

Sweeney aims to increase the role of the AFL-CIO in both leading and executing the ambitious new plans, but ultimately his success depends on how many unions are willing to transform themselves. Most importantly, unions need to increase their organizing budgets, from an average of less than 5 percent to more than 30 percent of their budgets—the proportion that SEIU now allocates. Even if the AFL-CIO commits \$20 million to organizing out of its \$65 million annual budget, the really big money must still come from individual unions. But Sweeney and the AFL-CIO can lead the way by providing inspiration, models, training, strategic thinking and small financial incentives. Peer pressure will also nudge more unions to organize.

"The ultimate test will not be whether the international unions go along [with Sweeney's proposals], but how much they participate," argues SEIU organizing director Andrew Stern. "It's hard for everyone to readjust and look at the AFL-CIO differently." That will include giving up some of the jealously guarded autonomy that has ultimately weakened the labor movement by interfering with concerted action—as when unions failed to unite effectively to support the PATCO air traffic controllers when Reagan was breaking their strike.

Most importantly, Sweeney's success depends on unions mobilizing and training a hard core of dedicated members to be volunteer organizers, recruiting new members while stepping up political action. If even 2 percent of union members were ready to blitz, picket, protest, fax, write and make phone calls at a moment's notice, unions would have a formidable army of 300,000 organizers, dwarfing all other movements of left and right.

The Sweeney slate realizes that recruiting this volunteer army will be easier if there is more debate, more openness, more democracy and more participation. (Donahue, meanwhile, warned of how dissension threatened unity and "participatory democracy" was misguided.) As Machinists President (and key Sweeney backer) George Kourpias argues, expanding democracy renews members' confidence in their union, encourages them to organize and strengthens the union and its political clout. "Power needs to be pushed down to the lowest level of the union," he told a conference at Queens College.

Donahue clearly was far less inclined to rev up labor's latent power than Sweeney was. Donahue dismissed the notion that CIO experiences serve as a model for today and judged that militant rhetoric is "too often a call to arms [that workers] cannot, and will not, answer." Uncautiously "raising the decibel level," he argued, could "marginalize this movement and consign it to the fringes of society"—as if excessive caution had not done that already.

Trying to portray Sweeney backers as dangerous radicals, Donahue charged Sweeney with becoming the voice of those who want "to shout louder and break down the system, in the hopes, I suppose, that out of the ashes of the old comes something better. I must tell you there's nothing new about that voice. What a century of our experience with it has left us is ashes."

Yet many in the Sweeney camp think the '30s still offer a valuable lesson. Both political and corporate recognition of labor's rights came then in part because of the threat of social chaos, and a social contract emerged, especially during World War II, that traded orderly collective bargaining and, eventually, industrial stability, for union recognition. In the years since then, the social contract has unraveled through actions of the courts, corporations and Congress. Now the theoretical legal rights to organize, strike and take other collective action have been rendered fictions in real life.

Many strategists in the Sweeney camp think that unions

will be able to organize on a massive scale and overturn much antilabor legislation only if business and society are threatened with disruption on a grand scale. Conventional political campaign financing and lobbying have simply stopped working. "Basically we've got to stir up some shit until people listen to the issues, and the issues are clear," argues Mike Mezo, president of a big Steelworkers local. "Profits are on the upswing, wages are down." Economic injustice is key, but the issues are actually far broader: Can the economy be democratized to serve the needs of everyone and can workers become citizens with a meaningful voice and substantive rights in the workplace and society?

The convention vote was in part a referendum on whether a strategy of social disruption and mass organizing could make such questions of worker rights central to American public life. In a metaphor tossed back and forth during the convention, Donahue alluded to the recent tactic of blocking bridges leading into Washington, D.C., which has recently been used by SEIU's Justice for Janitors campaign. "We must worry less about blocking bridges and worry more about building bridges to the rest of society," he said. To which Sweeney replied: "I believe in building bridges, whenever the shelling lets up. ... But I believe in blocking bridges whenever those employers and those communities turn a deaf ear to the working families that we represent."

As Sweeney's remarks suggest, advocates of civil disobedience and direct action acknowledge that such tactics are not always appropriate: In nursing home battles, for example, SEIU focuses on employer shortcomings with patient care more than on direct action. On the other hand, even critics of the bridge blocking often support other kinds of disruptive tactics. Moments after describing civil disobedience as ineffective, for example, Douglas Dority, the president of the United Food and Commercial Workers union, warmly embraced sit-ins and factory occupations as "the greatest thing in the world."

With the 1996 campaign season already under way, the new leadership will quickly have to confront questions of political strategy as well as tactics to confront employers. Nearly everyone recognizes that organized labor has lost ground politically, but even within the Sweeney camp, union leaders are divided over what to do. Some emphasize the need to defeat Republicans and restore a Democratic majority, whatever its shortcomings; others want to develop their own pro-labor candidates within the Democratic Party or more selectively support pro-worker candidates. And a small, but growing, minority advocates a long-term strategy of building a labor party. Sweeney, in any case, risks his credibility as a "new voice" with workers—who are increasingly skeptical of labor's knee-jerk partisan defense of Democrats with lousy records—by uncritically backing Clinton, as he appears ready to do.

Political debate will certainly be heated, but Sweeney and Trumka insist that open, internal union arguments, whether over organizing tactics or politics, ultimately will make

organized labor stronger. They also recognize that unions must still find a way to stick together. Despite bitter feelings on both sides, private meetings between Sweeney and Dority produced a "unity slate" for a greatly expanded Executive Council that included all incumbents and a substantial increase in women and people of color, while still guaranteeing Sweeney a majority. Dority pronounced the wounds "90 percent healed."

It will take time to develop the most ambitious organizing campaigns, but Sweeney will need to take dramatic actions to establish that the labor movement has changed. Insiders will watch for crucial staff changes at the AFL-CIO. But one good prospect for broader public consumption would be a high-profile effort of unions and allies, such as churches and citizen groups, to pressure PepsiCo to stop buying corn syrup from A.E. Staley, which has locked out its workers in Decatur, Ill., for nearly two and a half years.

If worker rights are to emerge as the civil rights issue of the coming decade, however, unions will need allies who can both make such rights a broader social issue and help compensate for the countless—and growing—constraints on organizing and mutual aid. For example, United Auto Workers members can't legally refuse to handle tires from Bridgestone/Firestone, which permanently replaced thousands of strikers. Also, corporations and their Republican allies are pushing for new laws that will greatly restrict newer labor strategies, such as corporate campaigns (for example, limiting union rights to stockholder challenges to management). A northern Virginia Republican—ironically, a gun-control opponent—has even held hearings on legislation against "traffic terrorism," aimed at the janitors' bridge blocking.

Like their predecessors and like the civil rights activists, union members will have to risk jail, injunctions, fines and other legal sanctions. But unlike those organizing committees of the '30s, unions now have substantial assets to lose and current members whose contracts could be endangered. Consequently, they need powerful independent new allies, drawn from churches, citizen organizations and progressive groups, from feminists to environmentalists. This new organization could conduct civil disobedience, call for boycotts, or establish mass picket lines when unions find themselves legally restrained. These groups could do few better things to advance their long-term agendas than to help rebuild the American labor movement, thereby forging deeper ties among embattled liberal forces.

The Sweeney ticket, like Lewis and the CIO, is on "the right side of history," Cecil Roberts argued to convention delegates. History, however, is not preordained but made, and the new terrain of labor's battles—with global capital mobility and more gigantic opponents—is rugged. Whether the AFL-CIO's new leadership can forge the means to make history remains uncertain, but it clearly has the will to try. "In just six months we've changed the labor movement," Sweeney said in his victory speech. "Now we're going to change America." ◀



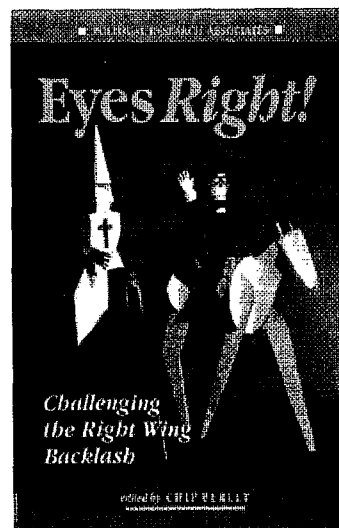
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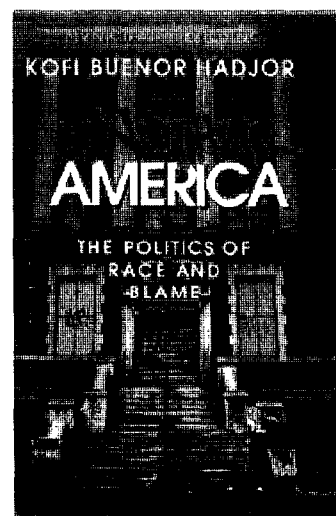
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**RACE**

# The end of integration?

*It will take more than Colin Powell and a corps of pundits to bridge America's racial divide.*

By Salim Muwakkil

**T**his October, race issues dominated public debate more than at any time since the urban riots of the '60s. The overexposed O.J. Simpson trial ended with a verdict that sent TV pundits and op-ed writers on a spree of recrimination and soul-searching. Two weeks later, almost as a coda to the trial, the "Million Man March" confronted white America with the menacing prospect of Nation of Islam (NOI) leader Louis Farrakhan thrust into the center of mainstream black politics. But for all the print and video devoted to these events, public discourse on race in America shows little sign of progress. As someone who regularly works the "race beat," I've been struck by the way these sensitive matters continue to be skirted in an elaborate social minuet.

Here's how it's choreographed: Major media identify a racial problem. Main-

stream pundits and policy-makers react to the problem in a manner that best burnishes their public image. That done, the major media turn their attention from the problem in a triumph of the "been there, done that" mindset. The problem festers until it erupts again. The dance continues.

The pattern recurs throughout U.S. history, but recently the pace seems to be quickening. The cycle of indignity and indignant response continues endlessly. In August 1991, Gavin Cato, a black child, is killed in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn by an errant vehicle in a motorcade of Lubavitcher Jews. Yankel Rosenbaum, a Hasidic rabbinical student from Australia, is murdered by a mob of angry blacks in retaliation. In March 1991, black motorist Rodney King is mercilessly beaten by several white Los Angeles police officers. When those cops are acquitted a year later, white truck driver Reginald Denny is assaulted by rioting blacks.

With each successive offense, the level of outrage rises, and our social anxiety increases; when it already seems we are drowning in a sea of racial controversy, another wave hits. We know instinctively that something's got to give. But by repeatedly postponing our necessary racial reckoning, we only lay the ground for shriller, and deeper, discord. Symbolic attempts at racial conciliation recur and fade. Just as many white New Yorkers helped elect David Dinkins the city's first black mayor in the hope that he would calm the city's turbulent racial politics, many white Americans now hopefully anticipate the presidential candidacy of Colin Powell. It's a false hope. Powell's charisma can do little to bridge the gap between the separate worlds that many blacks and whites inhabit.

The Simpson verdict and its aftermath vividly dramatized the vastness of this divide. It was not only the "not guilty" verdict handed down by the predominantly African-American jury that shocked whites, but also the euphoric reaction of some blacks. It seemed as if blacks, in their post-verdict celebration, were doing an end zone dance on the graves of Nicole Brown and Ronald Goldman. Writing in the *New Yorker*, Henry Louis Gates likened the white reaction to the verdict to the numb disquiet that followed Nat Turner's bloody slave revolt, when the Southern slave owner "was left to wonder which of his smiling, servile retainers would have slit his throat if the rebellion had spread as was intended."

In fact, most African-Americans were cheering the fact that a black man had finally extracted a fair trail from a merciless criminal justice system, and—as the script of race now seems to demand—many were surprised by the intensity of whites' outrage. A study released two days after the verdict by the Sentencing Project, which revealed that nearly one-third of black men between 20 and 29 are under criminal justice supervision, only bolstered the notion that the



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**Participants at last month's Million Man March in Washington.**

clutches of the justice system, and reinforced the widespread perception among blacks that racial bias in American society is deepening. But what does this new mood do to the old civil rights movement paradigm?

*Newsweek* magazine posed the question succinctly in its cover headline on Farrakhan's march and its portents: "Self-help or Separation: What's Next For Black America?" The question is slightly tautological. After all, as the wide variation in public perception demonstrates, black and white Americans already live largely separate lives. While we pay obeisance to the ideal of integration, we remain a rigidly segregated society. "No group in the history of the United States has ever experienced the sustained high level of residential segregation that has been imposed on blacks in large American cities for the past fifty years," write Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton in their book *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*.

Massey and Denton argue that the problem of inner-city deterioration could best be addressed by social policies that promote integration. But an increasing number of African-American activists and intellectuals are concluding that integration is an idea whose time has passed. "Maybe we should be looking more favorably toward nationalism," suggests the Rev. Eugene Rivers Jr., of the Harvard Divinity School. Rivers' support of nationalism is particularly noteworthy, given his reputation as one of Boston's most principled activists. A major architect of one of the country's most

successful youth programs, the Boston Freedom Summer Project, Rivers gained attention recently by publicly challenging the authoritarian excesses of Farrakhan's NOI.

Another current case points to these changing attitudes. Kenneth Jenkins was recently dismissed as president of the NAACP's Yonkers branch for conceding that court-ordered busing for integration may "have outlived its usefulness." Still hitching its wagon to the cause of integration at all costs, the

NAACP found Jenkins' second thoughts embarrassing. But Jenkins defends his revisionism with an appeal to pragmatism. "We need to evaluate what's working and what isn't working," he says. "Are we putting kids on buses just so we can say that we are putting them on buses?"

It is the sense that America is simply going through the motions of the familiar choreographed racial minuet that is provoking the African-American community to consider alternative directions. A number of studies, including one by University of Chicago political scientist Michael Dawson, show that African-Americans increasingly are adopting ideas that could best be described as nationalist. The increasing popularity of nationalism among black activists seems simply to reflect that larger shift.

Does that mean that the ideal of an integrated society has been discredited? Does activism oriented toward black nationalism exclude a role for whites in developing strategies for racial justice? These are questions that must be addressed candidly. Some advocates of black nationalism argue that African-Americans can truly integrate into this society only after gaining cultural and economic autonomy. "When you bring nothing to the table, you have nothing to offer or to bargain," explains Robert Starks, an assistant professor of political science at Northeastern University's Center for Inner-City Studies. "For us, integration has been a hollow prize because we had nothing to bring to the deal. Because of that, we are almost as separated now as we were before integration became the goal."

As the disastrous minuet of race spins furiously on, African-American activists are no longer dancing to the tune of integration. But it's not yet clear what the new melody will be.

**DRUG POLICY**

# Weed whackers

*America's drug warriors are shooting blanks in their attacks on marijuana.*

By Daniel Lazare

**L**ast December, Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala sidled up to a microphone in Washington and launched yet another phase in the drug war, this time against pot. Citing a recent federal study showing a significant increase in the number of adolescents smoking marijuana, she declared that the administration was not going to stand for it and would drive home the lesson that "smoking marijuana is unwise, unhealthful, illegal and wrong."

Since then, not much has happened. To date, Shalala's "Marijuana Initiative" has resulted in exactly two anti-marijuana pamphlets being issued by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and two conferences on the drug's supposed ill effects, one in Atlanta and the other in Houston. Otherwise, there's been no noticeable increase in the number of marijuana arrests (currently running at about 380,000 a year) and no noticeable increase in penalties (still

savage, although only a small portion of arrestees wind up doing hard time in prison).

Which leads to an interesting question: If a grandstanding cabinet member gives a speech that results in no discernible difference out on the streets, should anyone give a damn? The answer is yes, we should, although not for the reasons Shalala supposes. Pot is important not because of its supposed toxic effects, which are minimal, or its psychopharmacological effects, which are fairly mild, but because of its political role. Simply put, it is the weak link in the government's drug-war ideology, the point where the great bipartisan consensus is most vulnerable. As a member of the government's unholy trinity of illegal substances (the others being cocaine and heroin), pot is, by definition, evil, addictive and unhealthy. People like Shalala "know" this not because of any reliable evidence, but because the metaphysics of the drug war say it must be so. At the same time, though, pot is an immensely popular drug,

smoked by as many as 30 million Americans a year and sampled at least once by upward of 100 million.

From firsthand experience, millions of Americans believe, as John Lennon once put it, that pot is nothing more than "a harmless giggle." This fact presents the drug warriors with an immense and essentially insoluble problem: How to convince a near majority of adult Americans who know better that this innocuous substance is evil incarnate. The problem is even more agonizing because the ranks of marijuana initiates include so many members of government, beginning with the president, the vice president, the Speaker of the House and—surprise, surprise—Shalala herself. All have admitted to using marijuana in their younger days with varying degrees of frequency—in Shalala's case, as a student at the Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio, and at Syracuse University. Yet despite Shalala's claim at last December's press conference that there exists "a large body of evidence over the past 20 years" showing that marijuana is a gateway drug, none, so far as we know, went on to "harder" substances—unless political power counts as an addictive drug.

Shalala is right about one thing, though. A large body of evidence *has* accrued over the last 20 years or so concerning marijuana and its effects. Much of it has been government funded, yet the findings effectively contradict what the government wishes to hear: Pot, it turns out, is even more innocuous than previously believed.

As one roundup in the journal *Pharmacological Reviews* concluded: "Compared with other licit social drugs such as alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine, marijuana does not pose greater risks." Despite fears that THC, the active agent in marijuana, might build up in fatty tissue to dangerous levels, research to date "lead[s] to the inescapable conclusion that it is one of the safest drugs ever studied in this way." Indeed, the roundup notes, the *war* on pot has been far more threatening than pot itself: "Contamination of marijuana by spraying it



with defoliants has created the clearest danger to health."

In response to the barrage of official misinformation, two stalwarts of the anti-drug-war movement—Lynn Zimmer, an associate professor of sociology at Queens College, and John Morgan, a professor of pharmacology at the City University of New York—have drafted a detailed rebuttal of government-sponsored marijuana myths. The report, published this month by the Lindesmith Center, an arm of George Soros' Open Society Institute in New York, manages to debunk nearly every rumor floated about marijuana use. For example:

- NIDA warns that pot can lead to various kinds of lung disease. But Zimmer and Morgan point out that although marijuana and tobacco smoke are nearly identical in many respects, the substances are very different in the way they are used. Pot smokers do inhale deeply and hold the smoke in their lungs for long periods. But they also smoke far less than tobacco smokers—three to five joints a day, at most, versus anywhere from 10 to 40 cigarettes. Consequently, studies show that far fewer lung problems have cropped up among pot smokers. Although many doctors believe that prolonged usage will lead to chronic bronchitis, emphysema and other diseases, empirical evidence so far is lacking.

- Despite widely circulated reports that marijuana impairs the immunological system, Zimmer and Morgan point out that only one study has come up with such a finding in humans and that, while some animal studies have yielded similar results, they all involve megadoses of THC far in excess of what an ordinary pot smoker would use. Large-scale field studies of marijuana smokers in Jamaica, Costa Rica and Greece have found no significant difference in susceptibility to disease between users and non-users.

- Reports that pot harms sexual maturation and reproduction have also gotten wide circulation, yet Zimmer and Morgan found "no support in the scientific literature" for such an effect in either men or women.

- Contrary to reports that marijuana may cause structural damage to the brain, the researchers also point out that such results have occurred only in laboratory animals exposed to ultra-high dosages of THC. In the most recent study, in which scientists used face masks in order to expose rhesus monkeys to the equivalent of four or five joints a day for a period of a year, no evidence of structural damage was found.

- Despite persistent claims that marijuana can be addictive—duly parroted in recent NIDA pamphlets—Zimmer and Morgan note that symptoms of physical withdrawal have cropped up in humans only after being subjected to the equivalent of 15 to 20 joints a day—and even then the symptoms were extremely mild. In normal, everyday use, pot produces no withdrawal symptoms at all, which is why most users smoke irregularly rather than every day.

- Finally, Zimmer and Morgan found that there is as yet no evidence indicating that pot is a major contributor to auto accidents; that prolonged use leads to something known as "a motivational syndrome," i.e., a state of listless alienation; that pot is more potent than it was two or three decades ago; or that marijuana is a gateway drug. "Most users of heroin,

LSD and cocaine have used marijuana," they note. "However, most marijuana users never use another illegal drug." Rather than rising in tandem, heroin use fell in the '60s and '70s as pot use rose and then held steady in the '80s as pot use declined. Cocaine rose in the early '80s as pot fell and then fell in the early '90s as pot rose. LSD use, meanwhile, remained stable throughout. While 16 percent of adolescent marijuana users in the United States have also tried coke, the comparable figure for the Netherlands—where marijuana is essentially legal—is just 1.8 percent.

Marijuana does not get a completely clean bill of health from Zimmer and Morgan, of course—no substance could. If pot doesn't cause bronchitis and emphysema, it can, with heavy, prolonged use, lead to chronic coughing and wheezing. Although there is no evidence that it is harmful to the human embryo, it is still probably wise to abstain during pregnancy. Pot also adversely affects one's ability to drive and to perform certain mental activities, which is why it is not wise to toke up before getting behind the wheel or before a final exam in calculus. On the other hand, it would not be terribly wise to drink up before engaging in such activities either, yet alcohol is perfectly legal.

Despite the discrediting of various reefer-madness theories, the Clinton administration's attitude seems to be "damn the data, full speed ahead." In Atlanta this summer, Lee Brown, the nation's latest drug czar, tried to prove himself a tougher drug warrior than Newt Gingrich. Citing the House Speaker's recent statement that the country should "either legalize [drug use] or get rid of it," Brown accused Gingrich of "extremism and defeatism" in the war on drugs. Perhaps the Clinton team believes it can outflank the Republicans on the right by upping the rhetoric to ever more hysterical levels. If so, it's a flawed strategy. Polling since the late '80s shows that concern over illegal drugs has declined considerably in the list of public concerns.

The proper course in drug policy, as in debates over welfare and health care, is not to capitulate to the harshly moralistic forces that are fueling today's public policy initiatives, but to confront their specious arguments directly. It's a path that would require more political honesty than Bill Clinton has shown, but it is the only road to a more humane and rational drug policy. ◀

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## DIALOGUE

# Justice denied

By Fay Dowker, Jennie Traschen  
and David Kastor

**W**e are writing to express our grave concern over Scott McLemee's article ("Shadow of a Doubt," October 2) about the campaign to win a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal, who was convicted in 1982 of killing Philadelphia police officer David Faulkner. The article is full of misinformation, both about the case and the campaign, and is written in a patronizing and insulting tone. Perhaps most seriously, it denies the fact that racism is endemic in the U.S. "justice" system. The distortions are of the sort one can read all the time in the mainstream press. As such, they contradict the reason for having alternative publications such as *In These Times* and, moreover, do a great disservice to the campaign for justice for Abu-Jamal.

The most damaging distortion is the denial of the central role of racism in the case. McLemee writes with barely disguised contempt for Abu-Jamal's supporters, who, he suggests, are so obsessed with their crusade against racism that they don't realize that the case is in fact only about "saving one man's life." This assertion is simply false: Abu-Jamal's case clearly illustrates that a struggle for justice for a person of color in the U.S. criminal justice system is a fight against the entire racist system: courts, prisons, police, media and political structures. Practically every aspect of the case, starting from the fact that Officer Faulkner was beating an African-American man—Abu-Jamal's brother—for a traffic violation, is steeped in racism.

More distortion results from the omission of information. At the very end of the article McLemee says that Abu-Jamal deserves a new trial, but nowhere does he explain why he thinks the original trial was unfair. This information is readily available to any journalist, so we are led to the conclusion that McLemee has deliberately suppressed it and, in fact, does not want readers to believe that Abu-Jamal deserves a new trial, despite his simpering protestation at the end. The information ignored by the article casts reasonable doubt on practically every piece of prosecution evidence given in the original trial. For example, McLemee states that "bystanders" identified Abu-Jamal as the shooter in court. This is, strictly speaking, correct. But McLemee neglects to point out that these "bystanders" were exactly two in number, that they failed to identify Abu-Jamal as the shooter in their original statements to police and that their stories changed several times in the months before the trial.

One of them, Robert Chobert, was on probation, having been convicted of firebombing a school. The second, Cynthia White, was a prostitute who had three open cases awaiting trial when she took the stand. (One witness has testified that police told White she would be protected from prosecution if she fingered Abu-Jamal. Other witnesses state that White was not even at the scene at the time of the shooting.) Not only did other witnesses "report seeing a man running away" from the scene, but the original statement by Chobert also identified the running man as the shooter of Officer Faulkner. Furthermore, these statements, which indicated another possible suspect, were suppressed by the police at the time and were not heard in court.

Another example of misinformation is the way Abu-Jamal's alleged confession—in a hospital, where he is claimed to have admitted that he shot Faulkner—is reported: McLemee writes that "the police made no record of this confession in their reports at the time." Readers of *ITT* might like to know not only this, but also that a doctor present at the time did not hear Abu-Jamal make any confession. Further, the police officer who was with Abu-Jamal when he was supposed to have shouted out his confession wrote specifically in his report that Abu-Jamal had said nothing at all. This officer was "on vacation" and unavailable during the trial. Judge Albert Sabo refused a defense request to postpone the trial until he returned. It has recently been discovered that this officer had actually been in Philadelphia during the trial.

McLemee sneers at the proposition that Abu-Jamal was framed by the Philadelphia Police Department, calling it a "conspiracy theory." This disparaging dismissal of the many indications that Philadelphia's police and district attorney fabricated much of the evidence against Abu-Jamal is particularly disturbing. It not only insults the intelligence of his supporters but also obscures the rampant racism of Philadelphia's police force, which, along with the FBI, had kept Abu-Jamal under surveillance since he joined the Black Panthers at age 15.

Around the time of Abu-Jamal's trial, ex-police commissioner Frank Rizzo was mayor and the Philadelphia Police Department was enjoying a period of especially violent activity. Abu-Jamal's work as a journalist brought him into direct conflict with the police and Rizzo himself, who particularly resented his critical coverage of the 1978 police attack on the MOVE organization's Powelton Village commune. At a press conference attended by Abu-Jamal, Rizzo openly blamed "the new breed of advocacy journalism" for the police attack on MOVE. "[O]ne day," he warned, "you're going to have to be held responsible and accountable for what you do." Four years later, Abu-Jamal was on Death Row, and three years after that Philadelphia police used plastic explosives to bomb a MOVE household, killing six adults and five children. Faced with these facts, to dismiss the idea that Abu-Jamal was framed as a conspiracy theory is both ludicrous and racist. We might add that



this is not the only racist feature of the article. There is a condescending comment that Abu-Jamal's "militant" attitude on a poster makes it unsurprising that he was a Black Panther. Also, the author takes care to inform his readers that the meeting about Abu-Jamal's case that he attended in Washington took place in an African-American church.

Further insulting innuendo includes the comment that Abu-Jamal's choice to act as his own lawyer "made a bad situation infinitely worse," implying that Abu-Jamal, an intelligent, articulate and experienced radio journalist, was incompetent to perform the task. The court-appointed attorney subsequently forced on Abu-Jamal had no experience in capital cases and was, by his own admission, unable to deal with the trial and has since been disbarred.

A final inaccuracy is the statement that the petition for a new trial was denied by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court (PSC). This is not true: As of early November the appeal had not yet been filed with the PSC. Now is the time for anyone concerned with justice to contact the PSC to urge them to grant Abu-Jamal a new trial. (Call the PSC at (215) 560-3071.) McLemee's statement, "Abu-Jamal deserves a new trial, not followers," is self-contradictory: Without massive public pressure, Abu-Jamal has no chance at all of obtaining a fair trial. In fact, without the support he has received so far, he would most likely already be dead.

Throughout the fight for a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal the mainstream media has continually undermined the campaign by misinforming the public about the case. By publishing Scott McLemee's article, *ITT* has included itself in the opposition to justice.

Fay Dowker, Jennie Traschen and David Kastor are members of the Western Massachusetts Prison Issues Group.

## The Mumia Manicheans

By Scott McLemee

Sometimes the forces of good are aligned against the forces of evil, with no shadow falling between. Much more commonly, though, everything is grey. People on the left are, as a rule, no more dependent on the emotional satisfactions of a Manichean worldview than anyone else. But clearly Dowker, Traschen and Kastor do require that scenario. Therefore, by extension, I must wear the devil's own horns if they are to find their righteous place in the struggle. And so Dowker et al profess themselves outraged that my article denies "that racism is endemic in the 'justice' system." Consequently, they are confused to find that I support a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal: "Nowhere does [McLemee] explain why he thinks the original trial was unfair."

Let's see. I wrote that, in 1982, Abu-Jamal's court-appointed lawyer "seems not to have exerted much more effort than it took to show up for each day's hearing." My article stated that Albert Sabo, who presided over the case, has the vile distinction of condemning to death more people than any other judge in the United States, and that all but two of his victims were black. I noted that Sabo allowed prosecution questions about Abu-Jamal's political background and opinions to be entered as evidence against him. And I quoted Supreme Court Justice William Brennan's dissent in *McCleskey vs. Kemp*, in which he argued that a clear racial bias exists in the application of the death penalty.

So much for my efforts to insinuate Republican ideology into *ITT*'s pages. As for the charge that my article "suppressed" the evidence that Mumia is innocent, I plead guilty. Indeed, I said little about the evidence, beyond noting that "there are very few uncontested facts in the case." But, since they bring it up: The most passionate supporters of Mumia themselves display a knack for, let us not say "suppressing," but *overlooking* some key evidence. Consider, for example, the bullet that killed Faulkner. The doctor performing the autopsy stated, in 1981, that it had been fired from a .44-caliber gun. That fact is duly noted in the literature of many Abu-Jamal supporters—for the revolver he carried was a .38. But the coroner was not a ballistics expert; and when one did examine the evidence, it was suggested that the bullet might be of the type that, though it can be fired from a .38, expands upon hitting its target. And so—from other, presumably more up-to-date adherents of the "Mumia is innocent" school—one now learns that the bullet in question was much too fragmentary for any analysis to determine whether or not it could have been fired from a .38.

Yet the cult of Mumia the martyr goes well beyond such pedestrian questions of evidence. Because he was an "intelligent, articulate and experienced journalist"—as the letter's authors state, and I quite agree—they assume Mumia Abu-Jamal was competent to serve as his own attorney. There is an old saying to the effect that a man who represents himself in court has a fool for a client. That applies to intelligent and articulate journalists as well as to ordinary mortals. Or perhaps the authors think Mumia Abu-Jamal would have won his release by pursuing the course he adopted in 1982: glaring at prospective jurors, threatening the judge with violence and delivering long, rambling political speeches.

Then again, long and rambling political interventions are plainly to the authors' liking—as witness their letter. Nor can they quite resist the urge to demonize critics, in particular through race-baiting. I am a deeply racist person, it seems, for indicating that the "feeble" meeting in D.C. took place in an African-American church. Yet what really outraged them, I suspect, is a bit of subliminal satire. For, my article then said, the crowd was "not the usual flock that gathered there," but rather a contingent of radicals mouthing, and plainly intoxicated by, the familiar slogans. These silly people were—need I add this?—every bit as white as my own smirking self.

# I N T H E A R T S

## Vegas and the void

W

hen first seen in *Leaving Las Vegas*, Ben Sanderson is shopping in Los Angeles. With a terrifying blitheness that belongs only to actor Nicolas Cage, Ben fills—and I do mean fills—a grocery cart with bottles of liquor. Within a few minutes of screen time, Ben has estranged his last friend in the world by dragging him away from his dinner partners in a posh restaurant, and he's been fired from his film-studio job with infinite tenderness by a sympathetic boss. He's definitely ready for Las Vegas, and the last swift spiral down to the fate he so eagerly and inexplicably desires.

Nothing stops him, as it would in any other movie, but he does have a strange interlude on the Strip. He forges a last link with the world and finds someone to escort him to death's door. Her name is Sera (as in

"Que Sera, Sera"). Played by Elisabeth Shue, Sera is a recent L.A. refugee herself, a pricey prostitute decked out in leather, who finds in Ben someone on whom to lavish all the feeling left over from those soulless encounters in strangers' beds.

Ben is cheerfully skeptical of her devotion but nevertheless smitten. They proceed to be happy in the sometime way of the addict or alcoholic, while getting thrown out of a succession of haunts, including casinos, apartments and resorts. Like one of the smoky ballads that fills the soundtrack, *Leaving Las Vegas* ebbs and flows with dolorous waves of exhilaration and melancholy. It's a once-in-a-lifetime duet for actors Cage and Shue, and a showcase for the talents of writer, director, composer and bit player (as a mobster) Mike Figgis, a transplanted Briton whose films include the thriller *Stormy Monday* (1988) and the last good Richard Gere movie, *Internal Affairs* (1990).

In particular, *Leaving Las Vegas* is a star turn for Cage, an underrated performer who often finds himself in awful movies. He is the only American actor who could possibly tap

the emotions that Ben both feels and conveys and still keep his equilibrium. This is a perfectly poised performance, in fact, with Cage finding inspiration after inspiration, breaking into his boss' goodbye with a strangled, high-pitched wail of "I'm sorry!" or crashing through a poolside table and looking up, from his place amid a garden of glass shards, to quip with startled insouciance, "I'm a prickly pear!" Indeed, everything about Ben is either in exclamation points or buried about three feet underground, and in Cage you can truly see a man teetering on the edge of the abyss.

Figgis wisely presents Ben and Sera without history or sociological explanation, except for hints. We see Ben burning snapshots of a woman and child. We hear Sera's nervous pimp Yuri (Julian Sands) allude to her running away. But this is a movie about two people in the moment, bereft of both past and future together. When Sera asks Ben why he's come to Las Vegas, he answers evenly "to drink myself to death" and he's calculated he'll need four weeks' worth of money. When she asks him why he wants to kill himself, he answers earnestly, "I don't remember. I just know that I want to." It's the most piercing and memo-

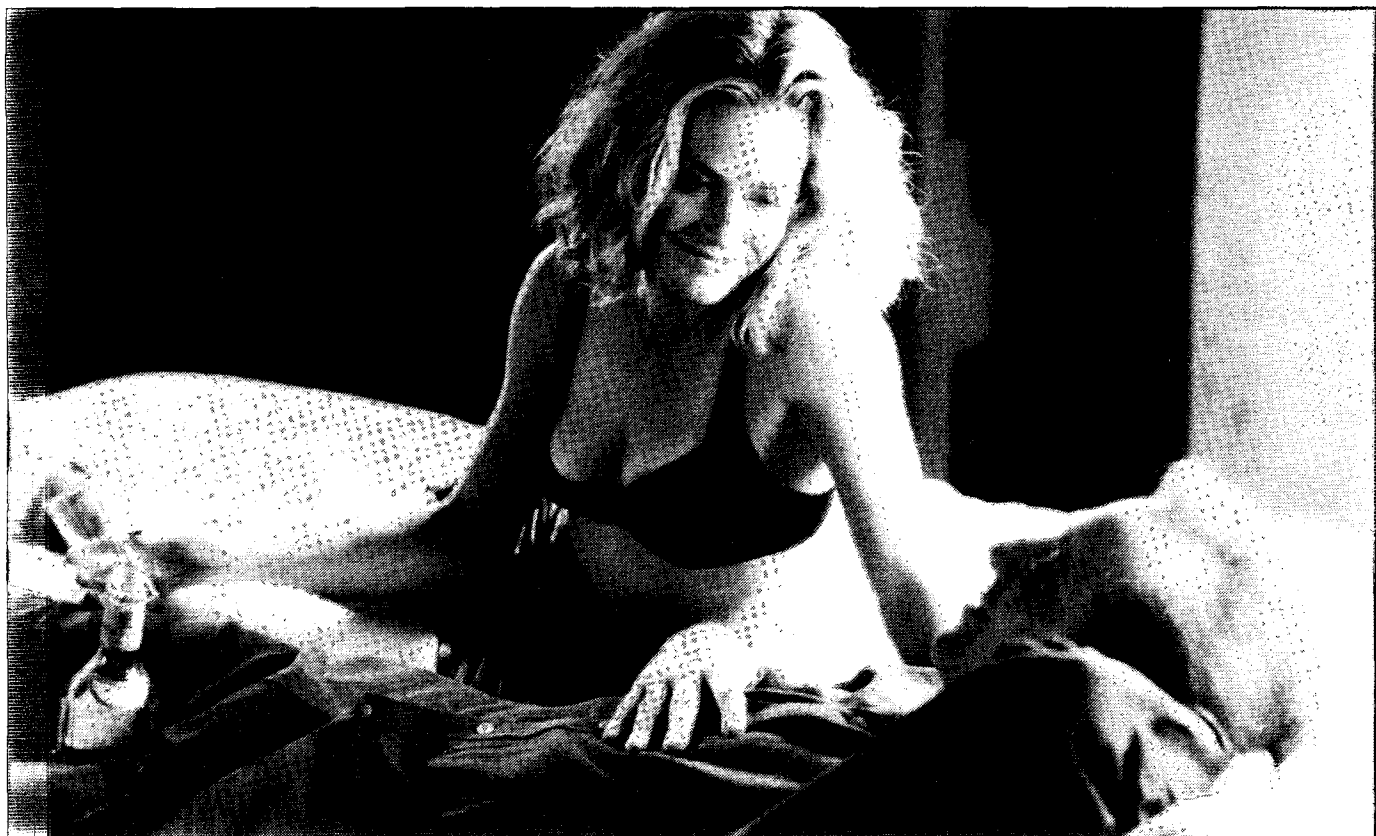
*A bleak,  
low-budget  
romance  
looks like  
the best film  
of the year.*

By Pat Dowell



*Leaving Las Vegas*  
Directed by Mike Figgis

PHOTOS: SUZANNE MANOVER



rable portrait of a man lost to drink since James Mason walked into the sea in the 1954 version of *A Star Is Born*.

Like Mason and the bereaved barfly of the jazz song "Angel Eyes," a lovelorn lament sung on the movie's soundtrack by, of all people, Sting, Ben is engaged in making a spectacular exit. Cage's cliché-defying, virtuoso performance is an extended riff on the old song's desolate last line: "'scuse me, while I disappear." He burns unbearably bright before he does so.

I've come to expect such performances from Cage, but I've always pitied the actors who shared the screen with him. He works so far out there that you never know when he's going to be wondrous or mortifying. But Elisabeth Shue toughs it out and triumphs alongside him, making even more of an impression perhaps because she is, after all, the actress formerly known as Tom Cruise's girlfriend in *Cocktail* and the spunky teen in *Adventures in Babysitting*. Withdrawn but all the same exposed, suffering Sera's indignities (including a gang rape) with terseness and a raw, unarticulated need, Shue gives a career-making performance. She even survives Figgis' decision to punctuate the story with scenes of Sera talking about Ben to an off-screen observer (a therapist probably).

That distracting device is just about the only miscalculated move Figgis makes in *Leaving Las Vegas*. Except for that, he has brought off a full-throttle neo-noir romance that is simply mesmerizing. A former musician, he has woven the story and the incandescent, color-saturated look of the movie together with a crisp jazz score that sometimes shades into

mournful, echoing washes of sound and wordless vocals reminiscent of the work of film composer Ennio Morricone. Sting sings three unembellished ballads—not only "Angel Eyes" but "It's a Lonesome Old Town" and, most heart-breakingly, "My One and Only Love," which becomes an anthem announcing impending happiness on Ben and Sera's first date. It is of course their most fragile moment as well, in a movie that establishes a mood as transiently beautiful and as easily extinguished as a candle.

Very modestly budgeted at \$3.5 million and shot on super-16 instead of 35mm, *Leaving Las Vegas* was still too much of a risk for the American companies that routinely spend \$10 million on publicity for far lesser films. It ended up being bankrolled by French producers. It's an appropriate fate for the film, in a way, since its fatalistic tone and paean to foolish love is extravagantly existential in a way that calls to mind the work of many French writers and filmmakers.

An American company, the almost moribund MGM-UA, is distributing the film, but every movie professional I've talked to, even people who love this movie, seem to think that its commercial prospects are exceedingly dim. So what if it looks like it's the best movie of the year, and a transcendent love story to boot? American moviegoers won't go to see a movie so dark, so depressing (the reasoning goes), so unredeemed by even a hint of a nod to the great yowling, hypocritical feelgood YES of American popular culture. Nothing in *Leaving Las Vegas* is so depressing as that thought.



# I N P R I N T

## It's a living

By Nelson Lichtenstein

Contemporary books, essays and op-ed pieces endlessly debate the fate of American jobs: how to save them, raise their wages, and share them equitably among the sexes, races and regions into which our nation is divided. We are so desperate to encourage job creation that few of us, even on the left, debate the character and meaning of work itself, its degree of alienation, freedom and worker autonomy. These, it seems, are issues out of the early 1970s, as irrelevant as a pair of bell-bottoms. In a world of relentless corporate downsizing and hidden unemployment, who asks if those who still have jobs are happy in their work? Or if workers could do anything about it if they weren't?

Reg Theriault reminds us that these questions are just about the most important queries one can make about the experience that still defines who we are and how we live. *How to Tell When You're Tired* is an often moving meditation on the meaning of work, play and class, reflected through a lifetime of on-the-job anecdotes and wisdom. Reg Theriault is now in his early 70s. Before World War II, he was a migrant worker, a "fruit tramp" who followed the ripening apples, melons and oranges from Arizona to Washington state. The GI Bill gave him the opportunity to spend three years at the University of California at Berkeley, but some irrepressible proletarian wanderlust lured him back to the orchards and packing sheds. From there, he shifted onto the San Francisco docks, where his 30-year career coincided precisely with the era during which the militant Industrial Workers of the World held greatest sway among longshoremen.

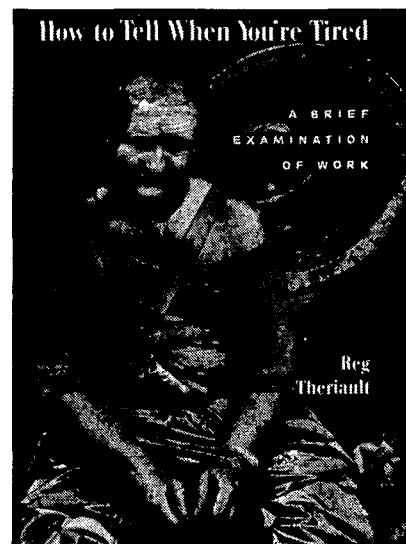
Theriault has packed this charming little primer with all the work lore and humane radicalism of the old Wobblies, for he has always sought to make manual labor not merely bearable but sometimes even fun. We learn here the intricate ritual of "on and off" labor in the hole of a freighter, in

which one half of the gang lazes about while their partners take turns loading the sling. Along the way, Theriault offers a fascinating guide to the safest, easiest method for loading 154-pound sacks of coffee; and there's excellent advice on how and when to organize a confrontation with the boss. You want to time your fight for the mid-morning, not the hours of the afternoon. A foreman will think twice about firing you before lunch, because then he'll be short one or more hands for the rest of the day.

But workers can't solve all their problems. For those who work around machinery, injury is all but inevitable. Indeed, it represents the single greatest divide between manual workers and their white-collar superiors. In the old days, you could easily count a dozen missing fingers in the barroom crowd that gathered after work. Despite management's transformation of the hardhat into a fetish, "an amulet, a company-sponsored rabbit's foot," Theriault finds that "industrial injuries are the fourth horseman of the working class."

Theriault's parables are designed to demonstrate how work can be made playful, meaningful and dignified. He is hardly a revolutionary; he believes there will always be workers, bosses and drudgery. Yet he is not a cynic either, for he is convinced that the creativity and solidarity within the working class make possible the amelioration of even difficult labor. He is a believer, therefore, in the inherent virtues of mirth, playfulness and social intercourse, not only in the privatized world of leisure but within the world of work itself. All bosses seem to think laughter is a sign that waste is present, that not all effort is being devoted to production. But, Theriault argues, it is just such joking about that infuses our work life with an essential humanity.

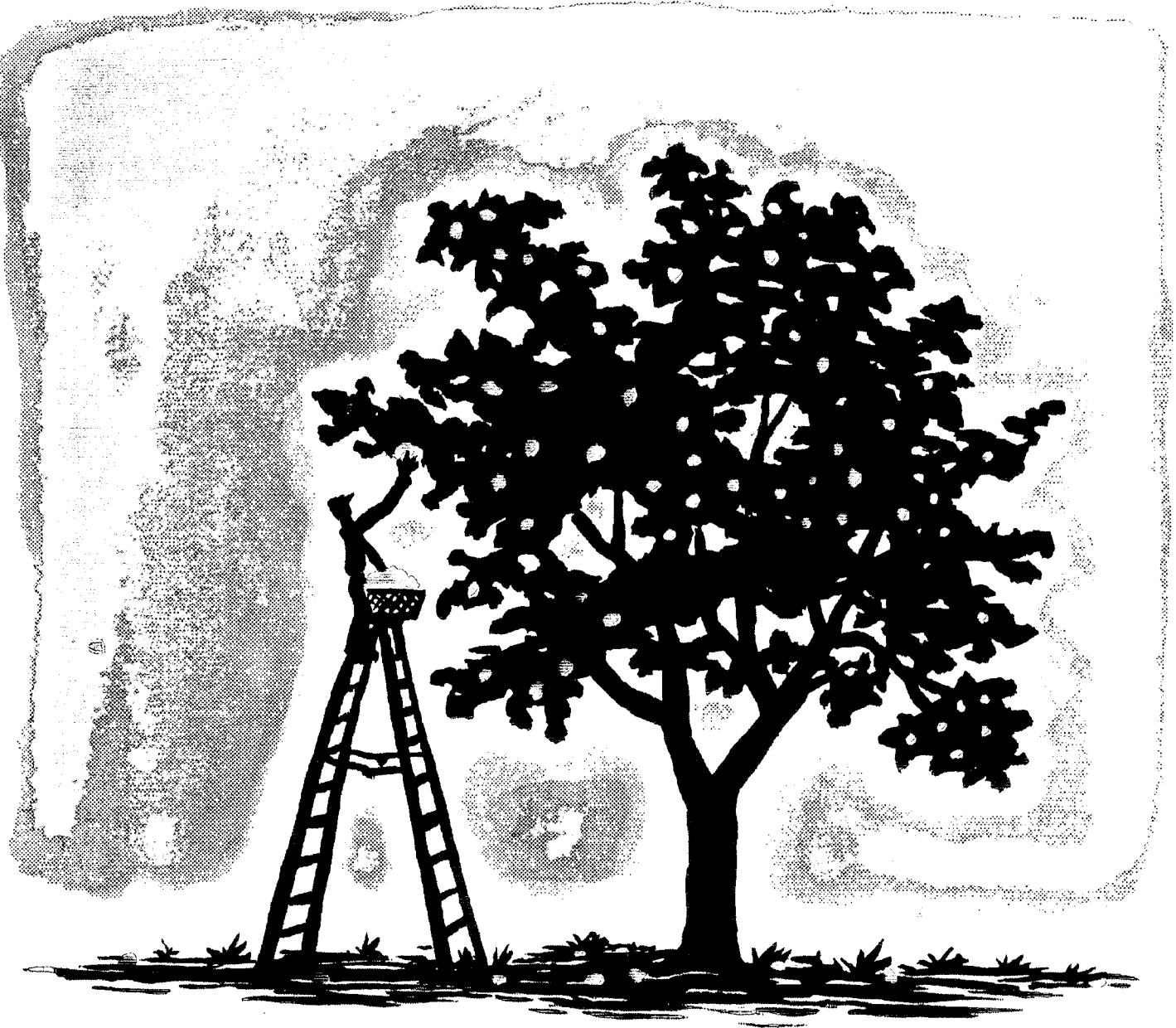
We now live near the tail end of the 20th century, in a world of fast-food franchises, desktop workstations and multinational subcontractors. Theriault's otherwise insightful book therefore has the feel of an artifact, akin to 19th-century cookbooks or turn-of-the-century Sears Roebuck catalogs. Working conditions on the mid-century Frisco docks were hardly the norm



**How to Tell When You're Tired:  
A Brief Examination of Work**

By Reg Theriault  
W.W. Norton  
188 pp., \$18

© 1995 KT BOYCE



even then, when organized labor was comparatively strong. In how many other occupations did the boss know that if he rode his men too hard, they could just quit, return to the hiring hall and pick up an equally high-paying job on the docks the next morning? Today there are probably no more than 7,000 active longshore workers on the entire West Coast. Virtually all cargo is now containerized, so the work lore Theriault has so meticulously recorded is now obsolete.

The problem here is not that we live in a computerized, post-industrial society that has abolished bosses and boredom. Rather, it's that Theriault's primer is so rooted in a now-vanished dockside world of men and machines that his advice could hardly be translated into a tutorial that might enlighten our world of low-wage, nonunion service, clerical and technical workers. Could the Wal-Mart clerks of our

day play a version of the "on and off" system that made heavy work bearable for a generation of longshoremen? Or have the airline reservation clerks of today, like the fruit tramps of half a century ago, found a way to slow their work pace when the supervision becomes too intrusive? Resistance and solidarity still exist, but we need a late 20th-century guide to our working lives as skillful as that supplied by Reg Theriault. He found a world of humane solidarity on the Bay Area piers: Our task is to translate his tales of the docks for a generation of 21st-century workers in order to demonstrate how the quest for autonomy and dignity at work can again become an impulse of enormous inspiration and power.

Nelson Lichtenstein is a professor of history at the University of Virginia and author of the *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (BasicBooks).

# I dream of genes

By Kathi Wolfe

America has fallen in love with "the gene." Everyone, it seems, swoons before the magic helix of DNA—from scientists who believe that genetics holds the key to a disease-free future to pundits who define racial differences in genetic terms. DNA has become our Delphic Oracle, explaining our destiny while serving as a metaphor for good and evil.

The pronouncements abound in our politics and culture. An ad in *Vogue* capitalizes on our admiration of "good genes" when it boasts that a Nike sneaker "has inherited its own set of strength ... stability, and a true intelligent fit."

In the political realm, former *Washington Times* columnist Samuel Francis echoed the views of many conservatives when he claimed at a news conference, "The civiliza-

tion that we as whites created in Europe and America could not have developed apart from the genetic endowments of the creating people."

The *Washington Times* fired Francis last September when these remarks were quoted in the *Washington Post*. Apparently Francis' opinions were too right-wing even for the *Times*. Yet at a time when such books as *The Bell Curve* (which argues that genes have made African-Americans less intelligent than whites) have become bestsellers, Francis' views don't seem that extreme.

In *The DNA Mystique*, Dorothy Nelkin and Susan Lindee present a penetrating

and perceptive analysis of how DNA has become a cultural icon in America. The authors document how the gene has shaped and symbolized American social policy from the eugenics movement of the early 20th century to the present.

The American eugenics movement began in the late 19th century and reached its apogee in the 1920s. Notables from inventor Alexander Graham Bell to industrialist John Kellogg evangelized for the movement. All classes, from laborers to ministers, were enraptured by its precepts. The First National Conference on Race Betterment in Battle Creek, Mich., in 1914, featured "mental and physical perfection contests" to identify "better babies" and "perfect school children."

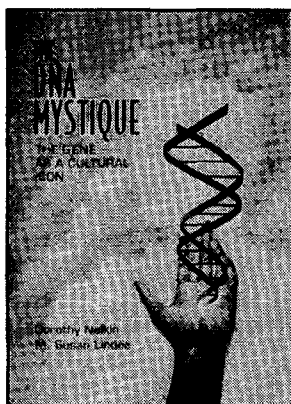
The atrocities of Nazi Germany discredited eugenics irrevocably, but much of the respect our culture accords the science of molecular genetics is still of questionable pedigree. As Nelkin and Lindee argue, America's infatuation with "genetic explanations" is also a "response to the stresses and strains of an increasingly secularized, complex and seemingly chaotic society." In a time of cultural frag-

mentation and anxiety, "biological explanations often appear to be more objective and less ambiguous than environmental or social ones," they write. "[G]enetics as a science of differences seems to provide reliable, clear-cut ways to justify social policies on the basis of 'natural' or predetermined characteristics, to differentiate 'them' from 'us.'"

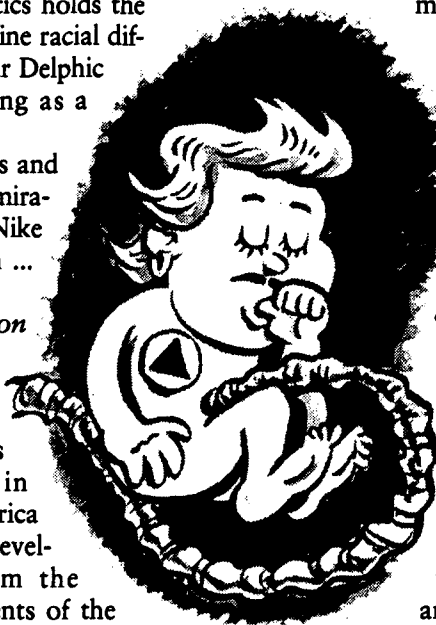
In the United States, genetics is far from confined to the realm of biology. It has become metaphorically associated with social policy, its meaning infused with often contradictory assumptions. "Genetic metaphors are used to buttress class differences ... and to reinforce social stereotypes,"

Nelkin and Lindee write. Such imagery is the basis upon which nations are unified and races are stigmatized. "Recourse to genetics can express a sense of fatalism—'the luck of the draw'—or a moral judgment—there are 'good' and 'bad' genes."

Citing numerous examples, from *Star Trek* to the special-interest magazine *The Disability Rag*, Nelkin and Lindee show how the genetic references suffusing popular culture are shaping public debate and attitudes toward such issues as crime, race, gender, sexual orientation and disability. Ads using genetic imagery to hustle cars and blue jeans can be viewed as amusing, if annoying, simplifications of a complex scientific and ethical issue. But *The DNA Mystique* is a wake-up call to all who would dismiss America's love affair with "the gene" as a merely eccentric obsession. As Nelkin and Lindee make clear, "the gene" has become a weapon for combatants fighting on all sides



**The DNA Mystique:**  
The Gene as a  
Cultural Icon  
By Dorothy Nelkin  
and Susan Lindee  
W.H. Freeman and Co.  
276 pp., \$22.95



© 1995 TERRY LABAN



in America's "culture wars."

The double helix of DNA, Nelkin and Lindee argue, has become a double-edged sword: Some groups stigmatized by genetic explanations are using "the gene" to fight this stigma. Their project involves an inversion of the traditional, invidious uses of genetic explanations, turning them into positive celebrations of group differences. Some feminists have celebrated the way biological differences set women apart from men, while gay activists have argued that because homosexuality is genetically encoded, gay sex is not merely a "lifestyle choice" but an imperative of nature. "These individuals," Nelkin and Lindee write, "despite conflicting social policy agendas, seem to agree about one thing: In contests over social worth, biology matters. Whoever can successfully argue ... that DNA supports their ... political viewpoint has a tactical advantage in the public debate."

Nonetheless, Nelkin and Lindee warn, socially stigmatized groups that invoke the special nature of their DNA may be in for more than they bargained for. Some gay activists, for example, are concerned that the identification of a "gay gene" may lead not only to an increase in discrimination but to the abortion of fetuses determined through genetic testing to be gay. (This scenario appears in the 1993 Broadway play *Twilight of the Gods*.)

Groups ranging from women to the disabled to African-Americans have reason to fear that information gained through genetic testing—in addition to racial, gender and other "genetic essentialist" stereotypes—will be used to discriminate against them and restrict their reproductive rights. In fact, insurance companies are already using information acquired through genetic testing to deny claims. In 1989, the *Washington Post* reported the plight of a woman who learned through prenatal testing that her child would be born with a birth defect but decided, despite this information, to have the child. But her insurance company refused to pay for the infant's medical care on the grounds that the fetus should have been aborted.

Clearly, access to genetic information holds possibilities for new kinds of discrimination in health insurance, employment and civil rights. Yet the complex questions being raised by new genetic research defy any attempts at simplistic answers. For example, blood tests can now predict whether someone is at risk of contracting Alzheimer's disease, presenting a terrible ethical dilemma to physicians and patients alike: Should doctors tell patients that they may contract an incurable, devastating disease? Should a fetus be aborted if it is found to have the gene for Alzheimer's? How can the privacy of patients be protected so that they won't encounter discrimination in employment or health care?

*The DNA Mystique* compels us to confront the dangerous implications of our culture's embrace of the gene as a metaphor. But addressing how these implications will play out in real life will require moving beyond cultural imagery into the more troubled domains of morality and politics. ◀

Kathi Wolfe is a freelance writer living in Falls Church, Va.

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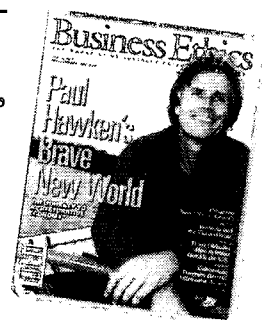
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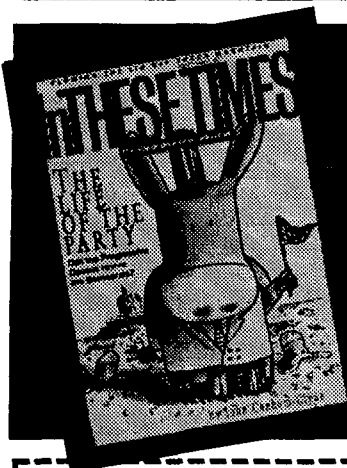
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## SPEED READING

**Children of Atlantis: Voices from the Former Yugoslavia**  
 Edited by Zdenko Lesic  
 Oxford University Press  
 208 pp., \$12.95

When the battle for Sarajevo began in early April 1992, most local students expected the exam period at the city's university to resume shortly after skirmishing was over. It was several months before they realized that exams for that year would be canceled altogether.

Unwilling to fight in a war they didn't believe in, many students—Serbs, Jews, Croats and Albanians alike—fled the former Yugoslavia to live abroad. In 1994, the Soros Foundations, a network of organizations that supports educational and humanitarian aid programs worldwide, began to issue grants through its Open Society Fund to aid these students. The short autobiographies collected here were selected from the grant applications the fund received in 1994. (The names of contributors are omitted to conceal their nationality.)

The applicants form a diverse group, including not only Bosnians but also those from regions such as Serbia and Kosova who don't want to be part of an ethnically identified society. Many are the children of mixed marriages; others consider themselves Yugoslavs by choice, not by birth.

The students' ability to see through nationalist dogma to discern a tradition of multiethnic cohabitation provides the book's main strength, but it also tends to deny ethnic and religious differences, blinding many contributors to the growth of the ideology of ethnic cleansing. "Stupidly enough, we had not even used the word 'war' to describe the events in our country," notes a radiology student from Sarajevo. "We kept talking about 'conflicts,' 'disputes.'" By assiduously blocking out the reality of their situation, many of these essayists have arrived at a view of history in which ethnic groups lived together peaceably until suddenly—overnight—they were at each other's throats. Even nearby fighting often seemed psychologically remote: "It all seemed to be happening on another planet," writes one engineering student from the Bosnian city of Banja Luka about events in Croatia.

But even if the past was not the multicultural idyll portrayed by many of the contributors to *Children of Atlantis*, their vision still provides an enabling fiction: It has helped these students overcome the stigmas that would have them regard each other as "enemies," while moving them to renounce violence and seek alternatives to the pathology of nationalism afflicting their former homeland. "Naturally, the idea of the open society cannot feed, heal, or bring peace," writes a student of art education from Belgrade. "But, like a utopia or fairytale, it can initiate new meanings about a better life."

In the decades ahead, any hope of lasting peace in the Balkans will require such imaginative thinking.

—Karen Rosenberg

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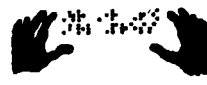
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*Continued from page 40*

celebrate the highway system's inauguration, auto manufacturers introduced design embellishments that transformed luxury sedans from inverted bathtubs into sleek phallic carriages. Almost overnight, new models appeared that epitomized the wonder of the interstate and the self-aggrandizement of the corporate fiefdoms that profited most from it.

Four decades after the act of Congress that bankrolled its construction, however, the American highway system has come to be associated less with exciting vistas of transcontinental travel than with the humdrum irritations of the suburban sprawl it spawned: deadening commutes, traffic snarls and construction delays. So it should be no surprise that today's most ballyhooed luxury car should allow the upscale driver to go "off-road." Neither sedan nor truck, station wagon nor hatchback, it is called a "sport utility vehicle" (or "SUV").

Every major auto company manufactures one of these aggressively terrestrial vehicles, under a set of common names: Cherokee, Laredo, Bronco, Blazer, Discovery, Pathfinder, Trooper, Rodeo, Explorer. Evoking horizons and frontiers, these names elicit a wilderness to seek and settle; they are the props of a libidinal Manifest Destiny in which the frontier spirit of yore is transmogrified into "attitude." In one 1992 TV advertisement, a GMC Jimmy, secured to a bridge by a bungee cord, plunges 700 feet into a river gorge, only to recoil from the river intact, as if it were on a rejuvenating weekend getaway from a cushy, conformist world of *Coupe de Villes*. The imagery appeals to many car-shopping pathfinders: Since 1994, according to Ford, SUV sales have constituted 24 percent of the new car market.

But how far off-road can these pathfinders go? Many models have proved poor performers in off-road tests conducted by *Consumer Reports*, and a surprisingly large number of SUV owners interviewed by dealers and manufacturers admitted to never driving off-road (except to skirt a disabled vehicle on an expressway). Indeed, the typical SUV's matte black donut tires, altogether more discreet than the monster tires of customized 4WD pickups, are more suited to asphalt than dirt. Their drivetrains, coupled to a weighty 4WD transfer case, guarantee poor mileage, so that a longish spin usually includes a trip to the gas station to fill a 25-gallon tank. Their cargo nets are destined, if not designed, to secure only grocery bags. Not to worry, though. The rugged look suggests that the driver at least wants to be elsewhere—climbing out of a canyon, maneuvering over a mountain or detouring through a defile to blaze a trail devoid of traffic back to the suburbs.

Taken together, these features suggest that, as with so many notional commodities, the SUV's promise of liberation and self-realization is little more than ornamental. Sport utility vehicles are designed by manufacturers and detailed by owners for everyday living in an upscale, genteel environment. More profligate gas-guzzlers than the mammoth Cadillac Fleetwood, they confer on their owners the privi-

lege most prized by consumer capitalism: the ability to waste. What is transmitted through the style of the SUV, with all the fastidious ease of an automated climate-control system, is not the thrill of speed (Pontiac GTO), economy (Ford Escort), or the panache of luxury (Jaguar), but a self-congratulatory aura of good taste welded to a nostalgia for being reckless. Ensnared behind a windshield as expansive as the plate-glass fronts of department store windows, buckled into the armature of luxury, the SUV owner is a tourist attraction to other motorists, a monument to the civilizing virtue of conspicuous consumption.

But there is more to the SUV craze than vicarious thrills. In 1994, Chevrolet contracted with an anthropologist to determine whether the booming sales of SUVs were a temporary or permanent phenomenon. Not only did this consultation yield good news for the company (the trend is permanent!), it also revealed some home truths about life in the '90s. "If you talk to the anthropologists we deal with," Jim Perkins, general manager of the Chevrolet division of General Motors, confided to the *New York Times*, "people want more and more control of their lives. You don't carry a gun, necessarily. But you try to stay above your problem." Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether a real "anthropologist" would bother to make such a banal conclusion, Chevrolet's apologia for the SUV takes its place among other truisms that pass today for serious social commentary: Society is violent because television is violent. The Internet is democratizing because technology is liberating.

Under the cover of marketing-research platitudes that masquerade as objective social science, the automotive industry subtly denies its own complicity in creating the problems people try to "stay above." The Road Gang used the Interstate Highway Act to enrich itself. It succeeded largely by pandering to the insecurities of the public, but also by offering more tangible promises of luxury and abundance to the consuming public—abundance that flowed from a corporate order of large-scale public expenditure along the lines of the war economy. By extending the country's roadways into areas hitherto untraveled by car, the new highway system paved a road for the automotive industry to new markets and ensured its triumph over the country's more efficient public transportation systems.

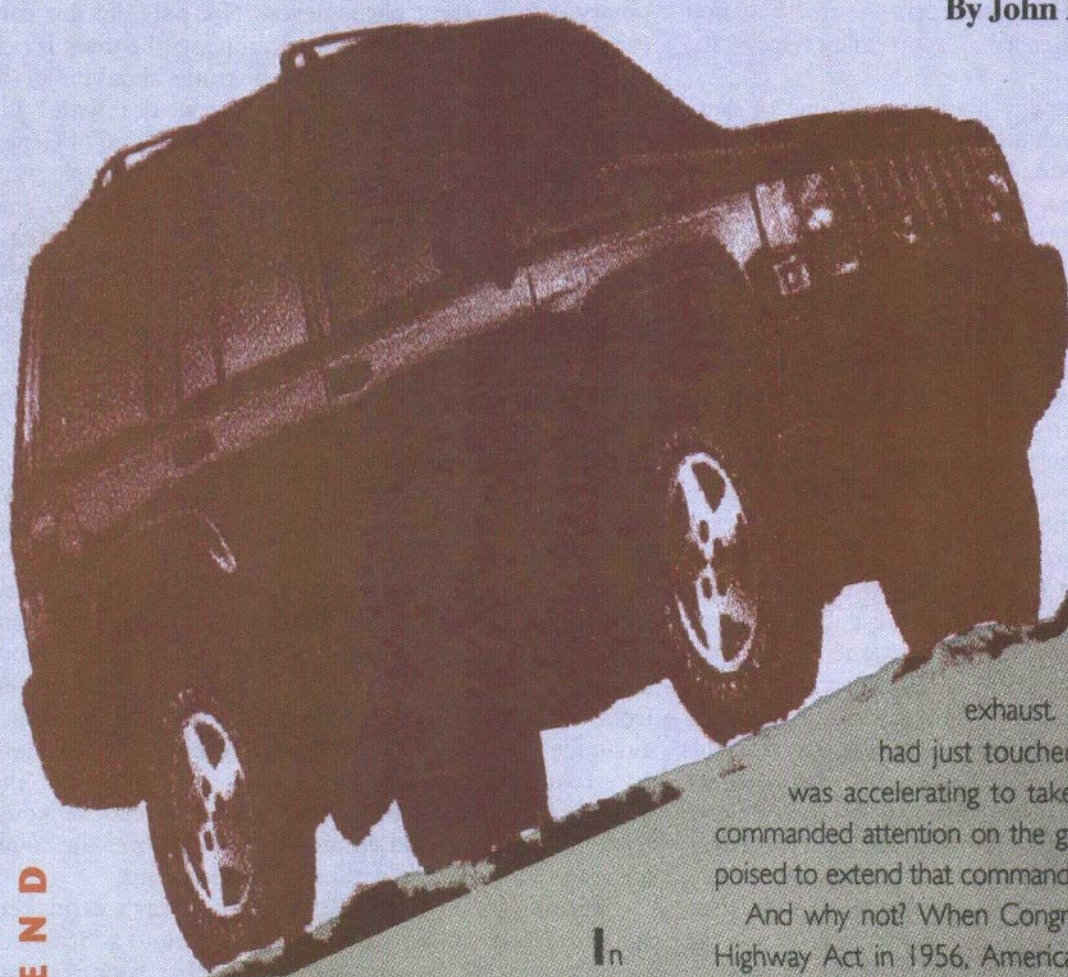
Reprising the infamous Road Gang, today's carmakers still endeavor to transform commodity-lust into a "frontier" of self-realization. But the optimism of that boom era has faded, and a new, nastier social compact underwrites the post-abundance consumer landscape. Americans are now confronted with a shrinking economic pie and increasingly cutthroat competition for a meager slice of it. And while the liberal ideal of self-renewal and the taming of nature are invoked in the mythmaking of the SUV, the once-universal liberal verities are clearly not for everybody—they come with a sticker price of \$30,000 or so.

John Palattella is a freelance writer who lives in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.



# Off-road to nowhere

By John Palattella



IN THE END

In the late 1950s, the tail fins of American cars shimmered with luxury and arrogance. Tail fins had existed since 1948, but when they appeared on several '57 Cadillac and DeSoto models, they were no longer decoratively integrated into the rear's subtle sweep. Flaring up behind the passenger's seat and tapering

out over the bumper's chrome expanse, they were wings fitted with rows of taillights that glowed like rocket exhaust. The sedan looked like it had just touched down from a flight or was accelerating to take off into the sky, and it commanded attention on the ground because it seemed poised to extend that command to the heavens.

And why not? When Congress passed the Interstate Highway Act in 1956, Americans were encouraged to think of themselves as kings of the road, vested with heavenly authority by neither God nor country but by the auto industry. Ostensibly a measure to bolster national defense against invasion, the interstate highway in fact constituted a vast public trough for the feasting of the "Road Gang," the cabal of oil, rubber and automobile interests that had assiduously lobbied for its construction. As if to

*continued on page 39*